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EDITORIAL

The symposium in this issue of *Focus* is on the realist novel in the thirties but, with one exception, the word 'realism' was not used in commissioning the articles. Nevertheless four of the five contributors have used the word and, given the differences in their viewpoint and methods, it is significant that they arrive at not dissimilar conclusions concerning the nature and limitations of realistic writing.

We hope to organize further symposiums on these lines in future issues of *Focus*. Suggestions and contributions are always welcome. MSS. sent in are considered on their merits, but we prefer the methodical essay to the impressionist comment, and studies of single authors (or even of single works of single authors) to studies of tendencies or *isms*. Intending contributors are advised to get in touch with the editor at Trinity College, Cambridge, before undertaking essays and are asked not to do so before October as the editor may have to go abroad. Rejoinders to articles in *Focus* will be read with special interest. We want to encourage this sort of discussion, because we believe that deeply felt statements for and against a conclusion, are between them likely to come nearer to the truth, than a statement which is deliberately and 'disinterestedly' neutral.

SYMPOSIUM

Ernest Hemingway

D. S. Savage

I

Ernest Hemingway is known as the author of a number of miscellaneous novels and short stories, as well as two books on blood sports. His best-known works, however, are two 'novels of love and war', *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and his significant development, such as it is (for only in a very special sense can he be said to develop at all), may best be seen by a comparison of those two works. In the second section of this essay such a comparison will be made, but to begin with I propose to examine the essential or typical qualities of the Hemingway presented to us in the general body of his work.

Hemingway first received attention, when he was publishing his earlier stories, as a *stylist*. And this is interesting, for the content of his stories is in great part crude violent action, not essentially dissimilar from the subject-matter of the stories found in cheap 'pulp' magazines with a primarily masculine appeal. It may reasonably be assumed that Hemingway satisfies, on a somewhat higher level of culture or of sophistication, the same imaginative cravings fed, among the semi-literate proletarian masses of England and America, by such productions as *War Aces* and *Action Stories*. The difference is that where the writer of 'pulp' stories is writing deliberately to a known consumer-demand, and where his products are, consequently, mechanical and lacking in psychological content, Hemingway is consciously an artist, writing to achieve an aesthetic effect, and is himself, therefore, emotionally involved in his own work. It follows that in his stories the emphasis is not, as in the 'pulp' magazines, entirely on the crude, mechanical action, taking place in a complete psychic vacuum. The psychological implications of the violence of the 'pulp' mentality are made explicit. In reading Hemingway we are made aware that the violent action

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itself, of so many of his stories, arises from the need for the alleviation of a prior and underlying psychic vacuity—an emotional state which is sometimes in his work suggested with great skill.

Hemingway is, within very narrow limits, a stylist who has brought to something like perfection a curt, unemotional, factual style which is an attempt at the objective presentation of experience. A bare, dispassionate reporting of external actions is all that Hemingway as a rule attempts, in presenting his characters and incidents. His typical central character, his 'I', may be described generally as a bare consciousness stripped to the human minimum, impassively recording the objective data of experience. He has no contact with ideas, no visible emotions, no hopes for the future, and no memory. He is, as far as it is possible to be so, a *de-personalized* being.

A brief glance at Hemingway's first book, a collection of tales entitled *In Our Time* (1925), will give us some notion of the essentials of his attitude and his equipment as a writer. These tales are really a series of brief, laconic sketches from the life of a man, together forming a fragmentary novel. The settings of the sketches alternate between the American countryside of Nick's boyhood, the scenes of war on the Italian Front, and post-war America and Europe. The action, however, is slight and subordinated to the predominant mood, conveyed with admirable honesty and artistic scrupulousness, which is one of utter and complete negation, almost of nihilism.

D. H. Lawrence, reviewing the book on its appearance in England, wrote :

Nick is a type one meets in the more wild and woolly regions of the United States. He is the remains of the lone trapper and cowboy. Nowadays, he is educated, and through with everything. It is a state of conscious, accepted indifference to everything except freedom from work and the moment's interest. Nothing matters. Everything happens. Avoid one thing only : getting connected up. If you get held by anything, break it. Don't get away with the idea of getting somewhere else. Just get away, for the sake of getting away. Beat it ! . . . His young love-affair ends as one throws a cigarette-end away. 'It isn't fun any more.'—'Everything's gone to hell inside me.' . . . He doesn't love anybody, and it nauseates him to have to pretend he does. He doesn't even *want* to love anybody ; he doesn't want to go anywhere ; he doesn't want to do

anything. He wants just to lounge around and maintain a healthy state of nothingness inside himself, and an attitude of negation to everything outside himself. And why shouldn't he, since that is exactly and sincerely what he feels ?

In Our Time, like much other of Hemingway's work, is fairly transparently autobiographical ; it reads for the most part like a literal, though of course uncommonly discriminating, transcription of bare experience. A simple stylist like Hemingway, in search of a material upon which to exercise and develop his skill, would naturally turn first of all to the material nearest to hand—i.e. that of simple personal experience. But a mind of Hemingway's negative and static quality will, it is evident, be unable to furnish sufficient material of a straightforward autobiographical kind for the simple craftsman to work on. Unlike a novelist of more complex and active mentality, gifted with psychological insight and the power to project, through the creation of character, a personal vision of experience—for whom, consequently, there would be no abrupt transition from 'autobiography' to 'fiction'—Hemingway is forced to turn for material to the plane, as I have said, of the 'pulp' magazine. His peculiarly negative view of human life quite naturally leads him to project his vision, when he leaves straight autobiography, into figures drawn from the lowest stratum of human existence, where life is lived as near as possible on an animal, mechanical level.

Here is a passage, from a work which is evidently autobiographical rather than otherwise and which has the advantage of representing Hemingway's characteristic factual style while at the same time presenting a fragment of typical subject-matter, which has its own implications on the human, moral plane. It is an incident in a military retreat from the novel, *A Farewell to Arms*.

"I order you to cut brush," I said. They turned and started down the road.

"Halt," I said. They kept on down the muddy road, the hedge on either side. "I order you to halt," I called. They went a little faster. I opened up my holster, took the pistol, aimed at the one who had talked the most, and fired. I missed and they both started to run. I shot three times and dropped one. The other went through the hedge and was out of sight. I fired at him through the hedge as he ran across the field. The pistol clicked empty and I put in another

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clip. I saw it was too far to shoot at the second sergeant. He was far across the field, running, his head held low. I commenced to reload the empty clip. Bonello came up.

"Let me go finish him," he said. I handed him the pistol and he walked down to where the sergeant of engineers lay face down across the road. Bonello leaned over, put the pistol against the man's head and pulled the trigger. The pistol did not fire.

"You have to cock it," I said. He cocked it and fired twice. He took hold of the sergeant's legs and pulled him to the side of the road so he lay beside the hedge. He came back and handed me the pistol.

"The son of a bitch," he said.

The transition from writing on this level to the subsequent and alternative level of the human underworld involves no very considerable descent, it is clear. The following is from a sketch entitled "The Killers".

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddam much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amusing themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent."¹

The wider implications of the above examples of Hemingway's manner and matter are, of course, related to the almost complete extrusion of his vision of life upon the plane of the external—the plane of extreme objectivization where experience is alienated from its subject. To deprive life of its inwardness, and to see men, not as personalities, but as objects, as things, is to open the door, not for a morally condemnable cruelty or brutality so much as for an even more devastating, because cold and spiritless, contempt of human values and of human life, which puts killing a man on the same level of actuality as cooking an egg or

¹ *Men Without Women* (1928).

blackening one's boots. For good measure, I give a further, and incidentally later, example of Hemingway's objective eye for violence.

The other fellow pulled the one who was hit back by the legs to behind the wagon, and I saw the nigger getting his face down on the paving to give them another burst. Then I saw old Pancho come around the corner of the wagon and step into the lee of the horse that was still up. He stepped clear of the horse, his face white as a dirty sheet, and got the chauffeur with the big Luger he had, holding it in both hands to keep it steady. He shot twice over the nigger's head, coming on, and once low.

He hit a tyre on the car because I saw dust blowing in a spurt on the street as the air came out, and at ten feet the nigger shot him in the belly with the Tommy gun, with what must have been the last shot in it because I saw him throw it down, and old Pancho sat down hard and went over forwards. He was trying to come up, still holding on to the Luger, only he couldn't get his head up, when the nigger took the shot gun that was lying against the wheel of the car by the chauffeur and blew the side of his head off. Some nigger.¹

Hemingway's *de-personalized* style, it appears, is the result of no detached, arbitrary choice. It is a style actually perfectly expressive of his outlook on life. In the flat, chaotic, elementary world into which we are introduced by Hemingway's fiction, everything is objectivized: inwardness, subjectivity, is eliminated, and man himself is made into an object, a thing. This entire extrusion of personality into the outward sensational world makes his characters the inwardly-passive victims of a meaningless determinism. They inhabit a world which, because it has been emptied of inwardness, is entirely without significance. The Hemingway character is a creature without religion, morality, politics, culture or history—without any of those aspects, that is to say, of the distinctively human existence.

Such an outlook is a peculiar one in a writer because it precludes the possibility of organic and interesting development. The Hemingway world is one of mechanical repetition, and in the series of Hemingway's nine or ten books there is no inward continuity to keep pace with the chronological sequence. It is therefore impossible to consider Hemingway as if there were some coherently developing pattern running through his progress

¹ *To Have and Have Not* (1937).

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as a writer. That there is a development of some kind, a *static* development, so to speak, I shall presently try to show. But the critic, I think, need feel under no special obligation to consider Hemingway's works as a sequence. The pattern is essentially a fixed one, made by the running of the mind in a deterministic groove. Apart from the two 'war and love' novels which must be examined separately, there is only one book which throws any special light on Hemingway's mind, and that is the book on the Spanish bull-fight entitled *Death in the Afternoon*, which serves the purpose of showing in a simple and explicit form Hemingway's fascinated preoccupation, which up to now I have refrained from commenting on, with the fact of death.

The profound spiritual inertia, the inner vacancy and impotence which is a mark of all Hemingway's projected characters, issues in a deadening sense of boredom and negation which can only be relieved by violent, though still essentially meaningless, activity. The more violent the activity, the greater the relief from the sickening vertigo of boredom. But activity of this kind is in fact a drug, and like most other kinds of drug, for its effect to be maintained it must be taken in constantly increasing quantities. Ultimately, however, the state of boredom, certainly one of the most horrible of human experiences, reduces itself not merely to the absence of meaning, but to the total absence of a sense of life. Indeed, it is a feature of violent action that while it cannot produce a convincing sense of meaningfulness, it can at any rate produce an illusory sense of *life*. Violent action itself, however, is almost always destructive action. Its end is in death. And, ultimately, when the sense of life itself vanishes, there is only one way in which it may be recaptured, and that is by the violent, absolute contrast of life with death. Life regains its 'reality' in such cases—becomes, that is, aesthetically sensational and vivid in itself—only when it is brought up against the stark, black negation of the void.

Writing, in *Death in the Afternoon*, of his early interest in the bull-fight, Hemingway says :

I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action ; what the actual things were which produced the emotion you experienced. . . . The only place where you

could see life and death, i.e. violent death now that the wars were over, was in the bull ring and I wanted very much to go to Spain where I could study it. I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things, and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death. . . .

So far, about morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after, and judged by these moral standards, which I do not defend, the bull-fight is very moral to me because I feel very fine while it is going on and have a feeling of life and death and mortality and immortality, and after it is over I feel very sad but very fine.

Death in the Afternoon, which partakes of the nature of an esoteric introduction to a blood-cult, is written throughout in a tone of alternating naïve solemnity and cynical jocularly. But here, he seems to imply, in a senseless, mechanical and phoney world, is something which seems to be real and meaningful, and which may somehow be approached in a way which will impart a sense of significance and reality to living.

. . . Someone with English blood has written : ' Life is real ; life is earnest ; and the grave is not its goal.' And where did they bury him ? and what became of the reality and the earnestness ? The people of Castilla have great common sense. They could not produce a poet who would write a line like that. They know death is the unescapable reality, the one thing any man may be sure of ; the only security ; that it transcends all modern comforts and that with it you do not need a bath-tub in every American home, nor, when you have it, do you need the radio. They think a great deal about death, and when they have a religion they have one which believes that life is much shorter than death. Having this feeling they take an intelligent interest in death. . . .

Such passages as this do at least reveal the nature, whatever one may think of its value, of the chief preservative of Hemingway's significance as a writer, that kind of desperate honesty which, once the bottom has been knocked out of things by painful and horrifying experience, cannot rest content with the pusillatimous compromises with which most people afterwards patch up their lives, and which one detects in the revulsion from the ' bath-tub in every American home ', and in the manifest dread of any kind of ' faking ' (in writing as in bull-fighting) which is displayed throughout the book. A glance at one further facet of Hemingway's personal outlook, and we can pass on from

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this brief survey of his typical work. In *Green Hills of Africa* (1936), a tedious description of a hunting trip, there are two passages which are of interest for the light they throw on Hemingway as a writer. The first concerns *subject*.

I thought about Tolstoy and about what a great advantage an experience of war was to a writer. It was one of the major subjects and certainly one of the hardest to write truly of, and those writers who had not seen it were always very jealous and tried to make it seem unimportant, or abnormal, or a disease as a subject, while, really, it was just something quite irreplaceable that they had missed. . . .

The second concerns, not subject, and not technique, exactly, but the writer's intention :

The reason every one now tries to avoid it, to deny that it is important, to make it seem vain to try to do it, is because it is so difficult. Too many factors must combine to make it possible. . . . The kind of writing that can be done. How far prose can be carried if anyone is serious enough and has luck. There is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten. [And if a writer can get this] . . . Then nothing else matters. It is more important than anything he can do. The chances are, of course, that he will fail. But there is a chance that he succeeds. . . . It is much more difficult than poetry. It is a prose that has never been written. But it can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards. . . . First, there must be talent, much talent. Talent such as Kipling had. Then there must be discipline. The discipline of Flaubert. Then there must be the conception of what it can be and an absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris, to prevent faking. Then the writer must be intelligent and disinterested and above all he must survive.

Such, or something such, is the conception of himself which Hemingway would like to project into the public mind. It is an interesting conception.

A novelist, of admitted literary merit, who lacks all the equipment generally expected of a practitioner of his art except a certain artistic scrupulousness and poetic sense, is something of a phenomenon. And while one would hardly suppose Hemingway could be considered as, intrinsically, a very important writer, yet, it is obvious, his purely symptomatic significance is considerable. For what does Hemingway represent but a special form of that which might be termed the *proletarianization* of literature : the

adaptation of the technical artistic conscience to the sub-average human consciousness? Sociologically considered, Hemingway seems to me to epitomize a phase of culture in which all the inward values which have sustained that culture in the past are vanishing, and nothing much is left but the empty shell of civilization—the shell of *technique*. The characters of Hemingway reflect accurately the consciousness of the depersonalized modern man of the totalitarian era, from whom all inward sources have been withdrawn, who has become alienated from his experience and objectivized into his environment.

C. S. Lewis, in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, drawing a distinction between the Primary Epic of Homer and the Secondary Epic of Virgil and Milton, points out that the former kind is deprived of the *great subject* possessed by the latter because 'the mere endless up and down, the constant aimless alternations of glory and misery, which make up the terrible phenomenon called a Heroic Age', admit of no historical pattern or design, which can only be given 'when some event can be held to effect a profound and more or less permanent change in the history of the world, as the founding of Rome did, or, still more, the fall of man.'

No one event is really very much more important than another. No achievement can be permanent: today we kill and feast, tomorrow we are killed, and our women led away as slaves. Nothing 'stays put', nothing has a significance beyond the moment. Heroism and tragedy there are in plenty, therefore good stories in plenty; but no 'large design that brings the world out of the good to ill.' The total effect is not a pattern, but a kaleidoscope. . . . Primary Epic is great, but not with the greatness of the later kind. In Homer, its greatness lies in the human and personal tragedy built up against this background of meaningless flux. It is all the more tragic because there hangs over the heroic world a certain futility. "And here I sit in Troy," says Achilles to Priam, "afflicting you and your children." Not 'protecting Greece', not even 'winning glory', not called by any vocation to afflict Priam, but just doing it because that is the way things come about. . . . Only the style—the unwearying, unmoved, angelic speech of Homer—makes it endurable. Without that the *Iliad* would be a poem beside which the grimmest modern realism is child's play.

It does not seem far-fetched to perceive some points of similarity between the Heroic Ages of the past and our own blood-stained epoch as it moves into an increasingly bleak future, and between

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the bards who recited the deeds of the ancient heroes and such a novelist as Hemingway—bearing in mind the retrogressive character of our own ‘heroism’, and, of course, putting the disparity between Homer and Hemingway into some proportion with that existing between, say, Hector or Agamemnon and Harry Morgan.

II

In any serious consideration of the writings of Ernest Hemingway, the fact must not be lost sight of that their author belongs to that generation of men whose formative adult years were spent on the battlefields of Europe during the first world war. It would scarcely be too much to say that Hemingway’s special type of outlook is a *product of the battlefield*. Hemingway’s comments upon war as a subject for the writer have already been noted. And it is a revealing fact that his two most coherent and most successful books, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1941), upon which his fame largely rests, are both ‘novels of love and war’.

Each of these novels stands apart from the bulk of Hemingway’s work by virtue of its embodiment of a sustained pathos ; and this pathos, it is evident, is an aspect of its interior connection with Hemingway’s own personal experience and vision of life. While much of Hemingway’s writing is the product of a somewhat uneasy attitudinizing, *A Farewell to Arms* impresses one with its surprisingly genuine and unforced quality. It is naïve rather than cynical, bewildered rather than ‘tough’, and there is a minimum of deliberate sensational violence. Although published ten years after the end of the first world war, its clearly autobiographical character would seem to justify its being related to the early and comparatively unformed Hemingway, the Hemingway who was himself, in youthful immaturity, thrust by circumstances into the scarifying circumstances of war and left to digest his experience as best he could.

For a novelist with no coherent inner vision of human existence, the problem of form must present almost insuperable difficulties : difficulties which may be envisaged from a reading of Hemingway’s two chaotic lesser novels, not considered here—*The Sun Also Rises* and *To Have and Have Not*. But in *A Farewell to Arms* this problem is solved by the exterior pattern of the events in which the curiously nameless hero is passively involved.

The story is straightforward. An American enlisted in the medical section of the Italian Army, the hero meets, near the front, an English nurse named Catherine Barkley. They are indifferently attracted to one another, and there is a rather flat emotional encounter between them, very well described. (Catherine is mourning for her lover, killed in France, to whom she had put off her marriage.) Then the American is wounded and sent back to a hospital where he is nursed by Catherine, and they fall into an intimate sexual relationship. After his recovery, the American returns to the battle-front, but is involved in a disorderly retreat, is arrested and about to be shot by military police, but frees himself, and, 'through' with the war, makes his way to the town where Catherine is living and escapes with her down the lakes to neutral Switzerland. Here, away from the war and in outwardly idyllic circumstances, the whole accidental, haphazard series of events reaches its meaningless, accidental conclusion with Catherine's death at the maternity hospital in giving birth to a stillborn infant.

In this novel, the war, of which the central character is a more or less acquiescent and occasionally involved onlooker, is only the background and setting for the central story of the relationship between the soldier and the nurse. There is a real suggestion of pathos in the impersonal, unimpassioned account of their forlorn, uncomprehending, tacit endeavour to maintain the illusion of the happiness and meaningfulness of their fortuitous relationship against their own deeper apprehension of lovelessness, frustration and fatality, although the emphasis is entirely on the objective occurrences, and the inward significance is never directly touched upon. The following passage will provide an example of Hemingway's honest realism in dealing with his 'love interest' :

We walked down the corridor. The carpet was worn. There were many doors. The manager stopped and unlocked a door and opened it.

"Here you are. A lovely room."

The small boy in buttons put the package on the table in the centre of the room. The manager opened the curtains.

"It is foggy outside," he said. The room was furnished in red plush. There were many mirrors, two chairs and a large bed with a satin coverlet. A door led to the bathroom.

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"I will send up the menu," the manager said. He bowed and went out.

I went to the window and looked out, then pulled a cord that shut the thick plush curtains. Catherine was sitting on the bed looking at the cut-glass chandelier. She had taken her hat off and her hair shone under the light. She saw herself in one of the mirrors and put her hands to her hair. She did not look happy. She let her cape fall on the bed.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"I never felt like a whore before," she said. I went over to the window and pulled the curtain aside and looked out. I had not thought it would be like this.

"You're not a whore."

"I know it, darling. But it isn't nice to feel like one." Her voice was dry and flat.

"This was the best hotel we could get in," I said. I looked out of the window. Across the square were the lights of the station. There were carriages going by on the street and I saw the trees in the park. The lights from the hotel shone on the wet pavement. Oh, hell, I thought, do we have to argue now?

"Come over here please," Catherine said. The flatness was all gone out of her voice. "Come over, please. I'm a good girl again." I looked over at the bed. She was smiling.

I went over and sat on the bed beside her and kissed her.

"You're my good girl."

"I'm certainly yours," she said.

There is, too, a queer, twisted pathetic quality in the lovers' final interview, when Catherine is on her death-bed.

"Do you want me to get a priest or anyone to come and see you?"

"Just you," she said. Then a little later, "I'm not afraid. I just hate it."

"You must not talk so much," the doctor said.

"All right," Catherine said.

"Do you want me to do anything, Cat? Can I get you anything?"

Catherine smiled. "No." Then a little later, "You won't do our things with another girl, or say the same things, will you?"

"Never."

"I want you to have girls, though."

"I don't want them."

These short passages are enough, perhaps, to make plain something of the novel's relatively sympathetic quality. There is an absence of deliberate harsh violence; what violence there

is comes, unsought, from the external circumstances of war, and is received passively. This is in keeping with the character of the young man, who is not a proletarian tough, but an average young bourgeois American. He is—not a sufferer, for although he endures suffering he refuses to accept it—but a victim, who has not yet become hard and cynical and addicted to violence as an end in itself. If, at the beginning of the story, he has a philosophy, it is a simple one of self-centred enjoyment, although towards the end, and after Catherine's death, this gives place to a naïve 'tragic' outlook, which is expressed in such reflections as these :

Often a man wishes to be alone and a girl wishes to be alone too and if they love each other they are jealous of that in each other, but I can truly say we never felt that. We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others. It has only happened to me like that once. I have been alone while I was with many girls and that is the way that you can be most lonely. But we were never lonely and never afraid when we were together. I know that the night is not the same as the day: that all things are different, that the things of the night cannot be explained in the day, because they do not then exist, and the night can be a dreadful time for lonely people once their loneliness has started. But with Catherine there was almost no difference in the night except that it was an even better time. If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.

The harsh note of suppressed grief on which this story closes expresses the fatalistic stoicism which arises in the young American out of his inherent inner passivity as it is affected by his sense of futility and of loss. At such an intensity of suffering there are usually only two courses open to the human heart, a receptive softening or a cynical hardening. But we already know that a desperate, bitter hardness is a characteristic of Hemingway's work as a whole.

A survey of the ground covered by the greater part of Hemingway's writings shows it to be that indicated in the first part of this essay—the delineation of an eviscerated, chaotic

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world of futility and boredom lit up with flashes of violent action, where life is brought into a sensational vividness only by contrast with the nullity of death. The bulk of Hemingway's writing expresses consciously an outlook on life which is negative to the point of nihilism. Yet, abruptly, at the conclusion of the Hemingway opus we find a work—*For Whom the Bell Tolls*—of an undeniably sustained and positive character, which has been widely received as revealing a profound and positive insight into the human condition and the life of our time. What sort of enigma have we here ?

That there is a reversal of attitude of a decisive kind is quite clear. For in this latter book we have a pattern, not of aimlessness, but of positive direction and sense of purpose, and a depiction, not of nihilistic despair but of lyrical acceptance, where futility is replaced by meaningfulness, and, instead of merely factual externality there is a significant, organic pattern to sustain the interior structure of the narrative. The pathos with which the story is imbued is a pathos quite different in quality from that of the Italian novel—it is a pathos which derives, not from a negative sense of victimization at the hands of life, but from a kind of subdued, lyrical ecstasy of acceptance.

The story concerns a young American, Robert Jordan, who espouses the cause of the Republicans in Spain during the Civil War, enlists with the Government forces as a dynamiter, and is entrusted with a mission, involving almost certain death, behind the enemy lines. Under the guidance of the old peasant, Anselmo, he reaches the hiding-place, a cave in the mountains, of the group of guerrillas who are to assist him in blowing the bridge on the specified day. There he encounters a mixed group of primitive people, including Pablo, the surly and untrustworthy leader of the group, Pilar, his powerful, earthily-sagacious wife, and a girl, Maria, whom they have rescued, after she has been raped, from the fascists, and with whom he quickly establishes an intimate relationship. The atmosphere among the little group is tense, partly because of the antagonism which arises between Jordan and Pablo, and partly owing to the necessary hazards of existence in enemy territory. But what contributes most to the psychical intensity which permeates the life of this little group and draws them together in bonds of intimacy, is their nearness to the fatality felt to be involved in the accomplishment of the

mission which has brought them into combination with the new-comer. After surviving some hazardous circumstances, Jordan, with the others, blows the bridge, but is wounded while escaping and left to face certain death from the approaching enemy, which he does with a gun in his hand and in his sustained mood of subdued ecstasy.

Nothing more clearly brings out the completeness of the alteration of attitude in the later novel than the juxtaposition of the following passages from each book, the Italian and the Spanish, concerning the heroes' attitudes towards the emotional aura that surrounds every cause for which men are prepared to kill and to die. This is from the earlier book :

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

Nothing could be more opposed to this than such sentiments as those expressed in the later novel :

At either of those places you felt that you were taking part in a crusade. That was the only word for it although it was a word that had been so worn and abused that it no longer gave its true meaning. You felt, in spite of all bureaucracy and inefficiency and party strife something that was like the feeling you expected to have and did not have when you made your first communion. It was a feeling of consecration to a duty toward all of the oppressed of the world which would be as difficult and embarrassing to speak about as religious experience and yet it was authentic as the feeling you had when you heard Bach, or stood in Chartres Cathedral or the Cathedral at Léon and saw the light coming through the great

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windows; or when you saw Mantegna and Greco and Breughel in the Prado. It gave you a part in something that you could believe in wholly and completely and in which you felt an absolute brotherhood with the others who were engaged in it. It was something that you had never known before but that you had experienced now and you gave such importance to it and the reasons for it that your own death seemed of complete unimportance; only a thing to be avoided because it would interfere with the performance of your duty. . . .

That a very peculiar transposition of emotional attitudes has been effected somewhere between the two novels is obvious. But by what agency has this startling reversal been brought about?

The answer is not far to seek. The characters in this novel prove on examination to be characters no less elementary than those in Hemingway's previous books, but to their elementary, stripped humanity has been added a rudimentary political sense. *Politics* appears to be the pivot which has enabled Hemingway to swing from a completely negative emotional polarity towards life to a positive one.

If this is the case, then it would appear that the claim of the Spanish novel to real and positive significance—a claim which has not been backward in coming from certain quarters—depends very largely upon the quality of the political consciousness displayed in it. Now, a political awareness of such a valid and enlightening character must, it is plain, be something very complex and organic to its possessor's personality, must at least affect, or be affected by, many other departments of its possessor's mind. Can this be said of Hemingway's political consciousness? It cannot.

I must pass over here the question of Hemingway's own political affiliations, of which I know little except that in 1936, with his compatriot, the socialist novelist, John Dos Passos, Hemingway visited Loyalist Spain¹ and came back a strong Communist sympathizer. In his writings, however, apart from a propagandist play entitled *The Fifth Column*, the first work of

¹ Where, according to an article in the radically leftist *Partisan Review* (April, 1938): "... Dos Passos found bombs horrifying, bloodshed gruesome, anarchists hounded by a Stalinist camarilla, the People's Front conceding to Anglo-French imperialism and suppressing socialism; [and where] Hemingway found bombs intriguing, bloodshed exciting, anarchists 'treasonable,' the People's Front noble, socialism nonsense . . ." etc., etc.

Hemingway's to show any social awareness is the novel *To Have and Have Not*, published in 1937, which is a crude chronicle of violent action (there are nine killings) upon which is superimposed, towards the end, a 'social' moral of the most elementary nature—a series of mechanical contrasts of the lives of certain members of the parasitical bourgeoisie with the under-privileged workers. The hero, an individualist adventurer named Harry Morgan, after a number of violent illegal escapades, dies, shot in the stomach, uttering the following profound observations :

"A man," Harry Morgan said, looking at them both. "One man alone ain't got. No man alone now." He stopped. "No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody chance."

He shut his eyes. It had taken him a long time to get it out and it had taken him all of his life to learn it.¹

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the rudimentary quality of Robert Jordan's political consciousness is barely disguised, and we may safely take it that the quality of Jordan's insight accurately reflects Hemingway's own.

You're not a real Marxist and you know it. You believe in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. You believe in Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Don't ever kid yourself with too much dialectics. They are for some but not for you. You have to know them in order not to be a sucker. You have put many things in abeyance to win a war. If this war is lost all of those things are lost. But afterwards you can discard what you do not believe in. There is plenty you do not believe in and plenty that you do believe in.

So much, then, for the quality of Hemingway's political insight, which, from its appearance in his works, would seem to be very meagre indeed. It is enough, however, to justify a black-and-white taking of sides in an armed struggle. But politics is the pivotal point only for what is in effect a total transposition of emotional attitude. What the nature is of that reorientation which, it is plain to see, gives this novel its organic structure and its sustained, epical positiveness, can now be made clear.

¹ It seems to have taken Hemingway quite a long time, too. In *Green Hills of Africa*, published only a year previously, he was writing in this vein : "If you serve time for society, democracy, and the other things quite young, and declining any further enlistment make yourself responsible only to yourself, you exchange the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself," etc., etc.

It is here that we touch upon the seeming paradox which makes it possible to speak of Hemingway's as a 'static' development. For what has occurred between the two novels is not a development, or unfoldment, at all, but a psychological shifting which has made possible a *retrogressive recapitulation* of an essentially identical theme. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* actually re-presents the same basic emotional situation as that stated in *A Farewell to Arms*, but turned, as it were, outside in. Whereas the accidental circumstances of war, sex and death, the poles of experience which provide the focal points for the emotional pattern, impose, in the earlier book, an external pattern on the narrative, reflecting the attitude of the central character as a passive victim, those identical circumstances are, in the later book, given an inward, positive significance and made intrinsic to the story, which attains thereby an interior coherence which is expressed stylistically in the rapt, exalted quality of the writing. It is exactly as though an emotional fixation, impressed on the mind by a certain original pattern of experience as the mind moved outward centrifugally to life, has determined, after a period of immobility, not a development, but an inward, centripetal, recapitulative movement, in which the accidentals become intrinsic; the negatives, positive; the mechanical and outward the organic and inward. This whole process of reversal is aptly conveyed in the embarrassingly rhapsodic style of the Spanish novel, emotionally orientated as it is towards the central cult-acceptance of sexuality and death, which is in interesting contrast to the emotional and verbal asceticism of the Italian book.

Death provides the primary emotional focal point of the novel. From the moment he appears it is plain that Robert Jordan is going to his death. His own awareness of this fact serves not only to intensify his sense of the vivid immediacy of the little life which remains to him, but to throw depths of fortuitous significance into his physical union with the girl, Maria. Just as in the earlier novel, here, too, the emotional series is brought to an end by death. But for the death, accidental and as it were peripheral, of Catherine—death experienced as meaningless objective fact and deprivation—is here substituted a death which is deliberate and essential, embraced by the central character himself as the ultimate factor of subjective experience. And not only death is here embraced positively, and emotionally sanc-

tioned, but also those other pivotal points of the Hemingway situation—sexuality (or ‘love’) and war.

The relationship of Catherine and the American ‘Tenente’ in the Italian novel is that of equals, and it retains some vestiges of human dignity which bring it within measurable distance of love, as distinct from animal sexuality. But that of Maria and Robert Jordan is one of uncontaminated animality, so uncontaminated indeed that Hemingway finds it possible to endow it with an absolute, ‘mystical’ significance. ‘When I am with Maria’, ruminates Jordan, ‘I love her so that I feel, literally, as though I would die and I never believed in that nor thought that it could happen.’ The emotional orgasm stimulated by his sense of proximity to death elevates every experience for Jordan into a realm of pseudo-mystical excitement. The mystico-sexual experiences of Robert Jordan reveal their nature, if that is in any doubt, by their existence in a psychic void; they have no connection with and no effect upon his other activities—although that perhaps is inaccurate, for there would appear to be a direct connection with death and with killing. And here the third significant transposition of attitude makes itself felt. The hero of *A Farewell to Arms*, passively involved in war, as passively accepts killing, and even himself dispassionately kills when the necessity seems forced on him—which happens only once in the book. And the context is not unfavourable to such animadversions on war as the following :

“Tenente,” Passini said, “we understand you let us talk. Listen. There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance cannot even realize at all how bad it is. When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who never realize. There are people who are afraid of their officers. It is with them that war is made.”

“I know it is bad but we must finish it.”

“It doesn’t finish. There is no finish to a war.”

“Yes there is.”

Passini shook his head.

“War is not won by victory. What if we take San Gabriele ? What if we take the Carso and Monfalcone and Trieste ? Where are we then ? Did you see all the far mountains today ? Do you think we could take all them too ? Only if the Austrians stop fighting. One side must stop fighting. Why don’t we stop fighting ? If they

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come down into Italy they get tired and go away. They have their own country. But no, instead there is a war."

"You're an orator."

"We think. We read. We are not peasants. We are mechanics. But even the peasants know better than to believe in a war. Everybody hates this war."

In the later novel, however, war and killing are much more enthusiastically undertaken.

"My rabbit," Robert Jordan said and held her as close and as gently as he could. But he was as full of hate as any man could be.

"Do not talk more about it. Do not tell me any more for I cannot bear my hatred now."

She was stiff and cold in his arms and she said, "Nay. I will never talk more of it. But they are bad people and I would like to kill some of them with thee if I could. But I have told thee this only for thy pride if I am to be thy wife. So thou wouldst understand."

"I am glad you told me," he said. "For to-morrow, with luck, we will kill plenty."

"But will we kill Falangists? It was they who did it."

"They do not fight," he said gloomily. "They kill at the rear. It is not them we fight in battle."

"But can we not kill them in some way? I would like to kill some very much."

"I have killed them," he said. "And we will kill them again. At the trains we have killed them."

But there is no need for the multiplication of instances. So much must suffice. If the earlier and typical Hemingway, the underlying factors of whose work I have done my best to bring to light in the first part of this essay, represents an aspect of the widespread sickness of our civilization, the Hemingway of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* reveals that sickness in an advanced stage, sickness masquerading as health, and, accepted as such, precluded from the possibility of being resisted. Of social, or 'political' insight, in this book, there is none. Hemingway's sole claim to such insight rests upon his perception, of dubious worth in the context, of the inadequacy of individualism—"No matter how a man alone ain't got no bloody chance"—and the superiority of what he had previously been pleased to term, in revulsion, 'the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades.' Hemingway's ostensibly 'profound' realization of the fact of human solidarity—

which is all of moral insight that can be said to emerge from the Spanish novel—permitting, as it does, under scanty ‘political’ justification, the division of men and women into two armed camps equipped and ready for mutual slaughter—hardly possesses any intimate relationship to the epigraph from John Donne from which the novel takes its title.

As for the consequences of Hemingway’s peculiar retrogression—a certain loss of sincerity and asceticism of style, the proneness to a peculiar sentimentalism, and the readiness to entertain the cheap substitutes for thought manufactured by political factions—we can safely leave these to the enjoyment of that enormous public which Hemingway has now found and which, one presumes, shares, to a measurable extent, his outlook and values.

Arthur Koestler

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One striking fact about English literature during the present century is the extent to which it has been dominated by foreigners—for example, Conrad, Henry James, Shaw, Joyce, Yeats, Pound and Eliot. Still, if you chose to make this a matter of national prestige and examine our achievement in the various branches of literature, you would find that England made a fairly good showing until you came to what may be roughly described as political writing, or pamphleteering. I mean by this the special class of literature that has arisen out of the European political struggle since the rise of Fascism. Under this heading novels, autobiographies, books of ‘reportage’, sociological treatises and plain pamphlets can all be lumped together, all of them having a common origin and to a great extent the same emotional atmosphere.

Some of the outstanding figures in this school of writers are Silone, Malraux, Salvemini, Borkenau, Victor Serge and Koestler himself. Some of these are imaginative writers, others not, but

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they are all alike in that they are trying to write contemporary history, but *unofficial* history, the kind of thing that is ignored in the textbooks and lied about in the newspapers. Also they are all alike in being continental Europeans. It may be an exaggeration, but it cannot be a very great one, to say that whenever a book dealing with totalitarianism appears in this country, and still seem worth reading six months after publication, it is a book translated from some foreign language. English writers, over the past dozen years, have poured forth an enormous spate of political literature, but have produced almost nothing of aesthetic value, and very little of historical value either. The Left Book Club, for instance, has been running ever since 1936. How many of its chosen volumes can you even remember the names of? Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Spain, Abyssinia, Austria, Czechoslovakia—all that these and kindred subjects have produced, in England, are slick books of reportage, dishonest pamphlets in which propaganda is swallowed whole and then spewed up again, half digested, and a very few reliable guide-books and textbooks. There has been nothing resembling, for instance, *Fontamara* or *Darkness at Noon*, because there is almost no English writer to whom it has happened to see totalitarianism from the inside. In Europe, during the past decade and more, things have been happening to middle-class people which in England do not even happen to the working class. Most of the European writers I mentioned above, and scores of others like them, have been obliged to break the law in order to engage in politics at all: some of them have thrown bombs and fought in street battles, many have been in prison or the concentration camp, or fled across frontiers with false names and forged passports. One cannot imagine, say, Professor Laski indulging in activities of that kind. England is lacking, therefore, in what one might call concentration-camp literature. The special world created by secret police forces, censorship of opinion, torture and frame-up trials is, of course, known about and to some extent disapproved of, but it has made very little emotional impact. One result of this is that there exists in England almost no literature of disillusionment about the Soviet Union. There is the attitude of ignorant disapproval, and there is the attitude of uncritical admiration, but very little in between. Opinion on the Moscow sabotage trials, for instance, was divided, but divided chiefly on

the question of whether the accused were guilty. Few people were able to see that whether justified or not the trials were an unspeakable horror. And English disapproval of the Nazi outrages has also been an unreal thing, turned on and off like a tap according to political expediency. To understand such things one has to be able to imagine oneself as the victim, and for an Englishman to write *Darkness at Noon* would be as unlikely an accident as for a slave-trader to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Koestler's published work really centres about the Moscow trials. His main theme is the decadence of revolutions owing to the corrupting effects of power, but the special nature of the Stalin dictatorship has driven him back into a position not far removed from pessimistic conservatism. I do not know how many books he has written in all. He is a Hungarian whose earlier books were in German, and five books have been published in England: *Spanish Testament*, *The Gladiators*, *Darkness at Noon*, *Scum of the Earth*, and *Arrival and Departure*. The subject-matter of all of them is similar, and none of them ever escapes for more than a few pages from the atmosphere of nightmare. Of the five books, the action of three takes place entirely or almost entirely in prison.

In the opening months of the Spanish Civil War Koestler was the *News Chronicle's* correspondent in Spain, and early in 1937 he was taken prisoner when the Fascists captured Malaga. He was nearly shot out of hand, then spent some months imprisoned in a fortress, listening every night to the roar of rifle-fire as batch after batch of Republicans was executed, and being most of the time in acute danger of execution himself. This was not a chance adventure which 'might have happened to anybody', but was in accordance with Koestler's life style. A politically indifferent person would not have been in Spain at that date, a more cautious observer would have got out of Malaga before the Fascists arrived, and a British or American newspaperman would have been treated with more consideration. The book that Koestler wrote about this, *Spanish Testament*, has remarkable passages, but apart from the scrappiness that is usual in a book of reportage, it is definitely false in places. In the prison scenes Koestler successfully establishes the nightmare atmosphere which is, so to speak, his patent, but the rest of the book is too much coloured by the Popular Front orthodoxy of the time. One or

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two passages even look as though they had been doctored for the purposes of the Left Book Club. At that time Koestler still was, or recently had been, a member of the Communist Party, and the complex politics of the civil war made it impossible for any communist to write quite honestly about the internal struggle on the Government side. The sin of nearly all left-wingers from 1933 onwards is that they have wanted to be anti-fascist without being anti-totalitarian. In 1937 Koestler already knew this, but did not feel free to say so. He came much nearer to saying it—indeed, did say it, though he put on a mask to do so—in his next book, *The Gladiators*, which was published about a year before the war and for some reason attracted very little attention.

The Gladiators is in some ways an unsatisfactory book. It is about Spartacus, the Thracian gladiator who raised a slaves' rebellion in Italy round about 65 B.C., and any book on such a subject is handicapped by challenging comparison with *Salammbô*. In our own age it would not be possible to write a book like *Salammbô* even if one had the talent. The great thing in *Salammbô*, even more important than its physical detail, is its utter mercilessness. Flaubert could think himself into the stony cruelty of antiquity, because in the mid-nineteenth century one still had peace of mind. One had time to travel in the past. Nowadays the present and the future are too terrifying to be escaped from, and if one bothers with history it is in order to find modern meanings there. Koestler makes Spartacus into an allegorical figure, a primitive version of the proletarian dictator. Whereas Flaubert has been able, by a prolonged effort of the imagination, to make his mercenaries truly pre-Christian, Spartacus is a modern man dressed up. But this might not matter if Koestler were fully certain of what his allegory means. Revolutions always go wrong—that is the main theme. It is on the question of *why* they go wrong that he falters, and his uncertainty enters into the story and makes the central figures enigmatic and unreal.

For several years the rebellious slaves are uniformly successful. Their numbers swell to a hundred thousand, they overrun great areas of Southern Italy, they defeat one punitive expedition after another, they ally themselves with the pirates who at that time were the masters of the Mediterranean, and finally they set to work to build a city of their own, to be named the City of the Sun. In this city human beings are to be free and equal, and

above all they are to be happy : no slavery, no hunger, no injustice, no floggings, no crucifixions. It is the dream of a just society which seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once existed in the past and from which we have degenerated. Needless to say, the slaves fail to achieve it. No sooner have they formed themselves into a community than their way of life turns out to be as unjust, laborious and fear-ridden as any other. Even the cross, symbol of slavery, has to be revived for the punishment of malefactors. The turning-point comes when Spartacus finds himself obliged to crucify twenty of his oldest and most faithful followers. After that the Sun City is doomed, the slaves split up and are defeated in detail, the last fifteen thousand of them being captured and crucified in one batch.

The serious weakness of this story is that the motives of Spartacus himself are never made clear. The Roman lawyer Fulvius, who joins in the rebellion and acts as its chronicler, sets forth the familiar dilemma of ends and means. You can achieve nothing unless you are willing to use force and cunning, but in using them you pervert your original aims. Spartacus, however, is not represented as power-hungry, nor on the other hand as a visionary. He is driven onwards by some obscure force which he does not understand, and he is frequently in two minds as to whether it would not be better to throw up the whole adventure and flee to Alexandria while the going is good. The slaves' republic is in any case wrecked rather by hedonism than by the struggle for power. The slaves are discontented with their liberty because they still have to work, and the final break-up happens because the more turbulent and less civilized slaves, chiefly Gauls and Germans, continue to behave like bandits after the republic has been established. This may be a true account of events—naturally we know very little about the slave rebellions of antiquity—but by allowing the Sun City to be destroyed chiefly because Crixus the Gaul cannot be prevented from looting and raping, Koestler has faltered between allegory and history. If Spartacus is the prototype of the modern revolutionary—and obviously he is intended as that—he should have gone astray because of the impossibility of combining power with

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righteousness. As it is, he is an almost passive figure, acted upon rather than acting, and at times not convincing. The story partly fails because the central problem of revolution has been avoided, or at least has not been resolved.

It is again avoided in a subtler way in the next book, Koestler's masterpiece, *Darkness at Noon*. Here, however, the story is not spoiled, because it deals with individuals and its interest is psychological. It is an episode picked out from a background that does not have to be questioned. *Darkness at Noon* describes the imprisonment and death of an Old Bolshevik, Rubashov, who first denies and ultimately confesses to crimes which he is well aware he has not committed. The grown-upness, the lack of surprise or denunciation, the pity and irony with which the story is told show the advantage, when one is handling a theme of this kind, of being a European. The book reaches the status of tragedy, whereas an English or American writer could at most have made it into a polemical tract. Koestler has digested his material and can treat it on the aesthetic level. At the same time his handling of it has a political implication, not important in this case but likely to be damaging in later books.

Naturally the whole book centres round one question : Why did Rubashov confess ? He is not guilty—that is, not guilty of anything except the essential crime of disliking the Stalin regime. The concrete acts of treason in which he is supposed to have engaged are all imaginary. He has not even been tortured, or not very severely. He is worn down by solitude, toothache, lack of tobacco, bright lights glaring in his eyes, and continuous questioning; but these in themselves would not be enough to overcome a hardened revolutionary. The Nazis have previously done worse to him without breaking his spirit. The confessions obtained in the Russian state trials are capable of three explanations :

- (1) That the accused were guilty.
- (2) That they were tortured, and perhaps blackmailed by threats to relatives or friends.
- (3) That they were actuated by despair, mental bankruptcy and the habit of loyalty to the Party.

For Koestler's purpose in *Darkness at Noon* (1) is ruled out, and though this is not the place to discuss the Russian purges, I must add that what little verifiable evidence there is suggests

that the trials of the Old Bolsheviks were frame-ups. If one assumes that the accused were not guilty—at any rate, not guilty of the particular things they confessed to—then (2) is the common-sense explanation. Koestler, however, plumps for (3), which is also accepted by the Trotskyist Boris Souvarine, in his pamphlet *Cauchemar en URSS*. Rubashov ultimately confesses because he cannot find in his own mind any reason for not doing so. Justice and objective truth have long since ceased to have any meaning for him. For decades he has been simply the creature of the Party, and what the Party now demands is that he shall confess to non-existent crimes. In the end, though he has had to be bullied and weakened first, he is somewhat proud of his decision to confess. He feels superior to the poor Czarist officer who inhabits the next cell and who talks to Rubashov by tapping on the wall. The Czarist officer is shocked when he learns that Rubashov intends to capitulate. As he sees it from his 'bourgeois' angle, everyone ought to stick to his guns, even a Bolshevik. Honour, he says, consists in doing what you think right. 'Honour is to be useful without fuss', Rubashov taps back; and he reflects with a certain satisfaction that he is tapping with his pince-nez, whereas the other, the relic of the past, is tapping with a monocle.

Like Bukharin, Rubashov is 'looking out upon black darkness'. What is there, what code, what loyalty, what notion of good and evil, for the sake of which he can defy the Party and endure further torment? He is not only alone, he is also hollow. He has himself committed worse crimes than the one that is now being perpetrated against him. For example, as a secret envoy of the Party in Nazi Germany, he has got rid of disobedient followers by betraying them to the Gestapo. Curiously enough, if he has any inner strength to draw upon, it is the memories of his boyhood when he was the son of a landowner. The last thing he remembers, when he is shot from behind, is the leaves of the poplar trees on his father's estate. Rubashov belongs to the older generation of Bolsheviks that was largely wiped out in the purges. He is aware of art and literature, and of the world outside Russia. He contrasts sharply with Gletkin, the young GPU man who conducts his interrogation, and who is the typical 'good party man', completely without scruples or curiosity, a thinking gramophone. Rubashov, unlike Gletkin, does not have the

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jumps ashore in Portugal, where he hopes to enter the service of Britain, at that time the only power fighting against Germany. His enthusiasm is somewhat cooled by the fact that the British consulate is uninterested in him and almost completely ignores him for a period of several months, during which his money runs out and other astuter refugees escape to America. He is successively tempted by the World in the form of a Nazi propagandist, the Flesh in the form of a French girl, and—after a nervous breakdown—the Devil in the form of a psycho-analyst. The psycho-analyst drags out of him the fact that his revolutionary enthusiasm is not founded on any real belief in historic necessity, but on a morbid guilt complex arising from an attempt in early childhood to blind his baby brother. By the time that he gets an opportunity of serving the Allies he has lost all reason for wanting to do so, and he is on the point of leaving for America when his irrational impulses seize hold of him again. In practice he cannot abandon the struggle. When the book ends he is floating down in a parachute over the dark landscape of his native country, where he will be employed as a secret agent of Britain.

As a political statement (and the book is not much more), this is insufficient. Of course it is true in many cases, and it may be true in all cases, that revolutionary activity is the result of personal maladjustment. Those who struggle against society are, on the whole, those who have reason to dislike it, and healthy normal people are no more attracted by violence and illegality than they are by war. The young Nazi in *Arrival and Departure* makes the penetrating remark that one can see what is wrong with the left-wing movement by the ugliness of its women. But, after all, this does not invalidate the socialist case. Actions have results, irrespective of their motives. Marx's ultimate motives may well have been envy and spite, but this does not prove that his conclusions were false. In making the hero of *Arrival and Departure* take his final decision from a mere instinct not to shirk action and danger, Koestler is making him suffer a sudden loss of intelligence. With such a history as he has behind him, he would be able to see that certain things have to be done, whether our reasons for doing them are 'good' or 'bad'. History has to move in a certain direction, even if it has to be pushed that way by neurotics. In *Arrival and Departure* Peter's idols are over-

thrown one after the other. The Russian Revolution has degenerated, Britain, symbolized by the aged consul with gouty fingers, is no better, the international class-conscious proletariat is a myth. But the conclusion (since, after all, Koestler and his hero 'support' the war) ought to be that getting rid of Hitler is still a worthwhile objective, a necessary bit of scavenging in which motives are almost irrelevant.

To take a rational political decision one must have a picture of the future. At present Koestler appears to have none, or rather to have two which cancel out. As an ultimate objective he believes in the Earthly Paradise, the Sun State which the gladiators set out to establish, and which has haunted the imagination of socialists, anarchists and religious heretics for hundreds of years. But his intelligence tells him that the Earthly Paradise is receding into the far distance and that what is actually ahead of us is bloodshed, tyranny and privation. Recently he described himself as a 'short-term pessimist'. Every kind of horror is blowing up over the horizon, but somehow it will all come right in the end. This outlook is probably gaining ground among thinking people: it results from the very great difficulty, once one has abandoned orthodox religious belief, of accepting life on earth as inherently miserable, and on the other hand from the realization that to make life liveable is a much bigger problem than it recently seemed. Since about 1930 the world has given no reason for optimism whatever. Nothing is in sight except a welter of lies, hatred, cruelty and ignorance, and beyond our present troubles loom vaster ones which are only now entering into the European consciousness. It is quite possible that man's major problems will *never* be solved. But it is also unthinkable! Who is there who dares to look at the world of to-day and say to himself, 'It will always be like this: even in a million years it cannot get appreciably better'? So you get the quasi-mystical belief that for the present there is no remedy, all political action is hopeless, but that somehow, somewhere in space and time, human life will cease to be the miserable brutish thing it now is.

The only easy way out is that of the religious believer, who regards this life merely as a preparation for the next. But few thinking people now believe in life after death, and the number of those who do is probably diminishing. The Christian Churches

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would probably not survive on their own merits if their economic basis were destroyed. The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness. It is most unlikely, however, that Koestler would accept this. There is a well-marked hedonistic strain in his writings, and his failure to find a political position after breaking with Stalinism is a result of this.

The Russian Revolution, the central event in Koestler's life, started out with high hopes. We forget these things now, but a quarter of a century ago it was confidently expected that the Russian Revolution would lead to Utopia. Obviously this has not happened. Koestler is too acute not to see this, and too sensitive not to remember the original objective. Moreover, from his European angle he can see such things as purges and mass deportations for what they are : he is not, like Shaw or Laski, looking at them through the wrong end of the telescope. Therefore he draws the conclusion : this is what revolutions lead to. There is nothing for it except to be a ' short-term pessimist ', i.e. to keep out of politics, make a sort of oasis within which you and your friends can remain sane, and hope that somehow things will be better in a hundred years. At the basis of this lies his hedonism, which leads him to think of the Earthly Paradise as desirable. Perhaps, however, whether desirable or not, it isn't possible. Perhaps some degree of suffering is ineradicable from human life, perhaps the choice before man is always a choice of evils, perhaps even the aim of socialism is not to make the world perfect but to make it better. All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure. It is his unwillingness to admit this that has led Koestler's mind temporarily into a blind alley and that makes *Arrival and Departure* seem shallow compared with the earlier books.

Ignazio Silone

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Ignazio Silone has been described as a realistic novelist. Before, however, we judge the accuracy of this description, we must reach a definition of the term 'realism', which, like other words classifying literary or artistic works, has in the past been used loosely and without a precise understanding of its meaning.

There are two kinds of writing commonly described as realist. The first is writing concerned with the outward and material manifestations of life, the symptoms rather than the underlying conditions and causes. Man is represented as a creature dominated by his material environment and responding to it in a way which bears no apparent relationship to any universal reality underlying both the environment and the human reactions. Such an approach almost ignores the intellect and negates completely the life of the spirit, nor is it linked to any philosophical conception which integrates the various aspects of life. Thus, the approach embodied in this so-called realism is in fact unrealistic because it portrays not reality but merely a single aspect of appearance.

The second type of 'realism' is Socialist Realism. This attempts to support a superficial and materialist representation of life by a Marxist dogma of the nature of history and society. Man is still economic and dominated by environment, still chained to a material and physical universe, and his highest ends are the achievement of material changes in the basis of ownership and social organization. Again, spiritual reality is ignored, and the intellect recognized only as a means to the achievement of material ends. The reality underlying these material symptoms is conceived in terms of a universe governed by materialistic laws borrowed from a superannuated system of scientific thought and combined incongruously with a metaphysical and immaterialist theory of history—based on a series of brilliant generalizations which have broken down in practice because in the last resort men are not masses, but individuals reacting in individual ways to the stimulus of historical forces and the operation of natural laws.

True realism, I submit, must seek to portray life in a manner that will embrace all its aspects, whether manifested physically,

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intellectually or spiritually. It must reveal to the full extent of the writer's knowledge and ability the nature of human development, and the complex unity of natural law by which it is motivated and governed. The writer who endeavours to show in his work such an integrated view of man and of his relationship with the world in which he lives and works, is truly a realist.

Ignazio Silone is a realist of this kind. His novels portray with remarkable vividness the life which the people of the Italian countryside lived under the Fascist dictatorship, the miserable hunger of the oppressed peasantry, the slow ruin of the small landowners, and the insecure prosperity in which the intriguing politicians and professional men contrived to live by destroying their moral feelings and ignoring the sufferings of the poor. But they demonstrate as well that the struggle through which the Italian people are passing is not merely a struggle for material ends, and that it is no isolated event, but rather one aspect of a moral conflict that embraces all mankind. The later novels in particular are concerned with the spiritual developments which mature in the minds of the revolutionary, the isolated liberal, the peasant in whom the power of thought is still not crushed ; there is a steady movement of vision towards a realization of the manner in which men can attain a life based on natural laws of freedom and mutual trust.

Silone's writing is concerned with social matters. Yet he is not a political novelist, for his writing proceeds steadily towards a conclusion that the regeneration of human society is governed by moral rather than political laws. Even less is he a propagandist, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, which in our day tends to signify a writer who seeks to convert people to an exclusive creed, and whose representation of life springs not from authentic experience but from preconceived dogma. The propagandist, by a meaningless abracadabra of generalizations and false symbols, attempts to induce action which cannot be fruitful, because it is based not on concrete temporal realities but on an intellectual abstraction. Silone, on the other hand, is a writer who has sought the truth patiently and has enriched his knowledge from the fruits of his experience. He has attained certain beliefs concerning the life of man, both as an individual and in society, but these have come to him not merely from studying the systems of political theorists, but also from observing the

external world and the inner life of man realistically, as he finds them and not as the theorists tell him they exist. By such means, he has developed from a believer in political dogma into an individual thinker striving to realize from direct experience and thought the nature of man's problem and the moral laws by which it can be solved.

To conclude these preliminary definitions, I would add that Silone is at once, and in a real manner, an autobiographical and an allegorical writer. All valuable writing is, in a sense, autobiographical, in that it is based on the writer's experience. Silone, however, belongs to the class of writers whose work is directly autobiographical, because it attempts to delineate accurately his own search for the truth. It is allegorical, in that the events he describes are related to a moral progression and a social vision as vital as those which are brought to life in the great and more direct allegories, the writings of Kafka or Swift.

Silone was born in the small town of Pescina, on the edge of Lake Fucino, which lies in the Marsica province of the mountainous Abruzzi. The date of his birth is perhaps symbolic. It was the last May Day of the nineteenth century.

Of the Marsica, and of the miserable life of its peasants, we are told in his novels, and particularly in *Fontamara*.

The soil was meagre, dry and rocky. The meagre soil was divided and subdivided, racked with mortgages. No peasant possessed more than a few acres.

Eighty years ago the draining of the Lake of Fucino caused the climate throughout the Marsica to become permanently hotter, to such an extent that the cultivation of the surrounding hills was ruined. The olive groves were utterly destroyed. Disease attacked the grapes, and they did not always ripen. They had to be gathered at the end of October, before the first snows fell, and they produced a sharp, acid wine, like lemon-juice. For the most part the same wretched peasants that produced it were doomed to drink it.

The soil reclaimed by the draining of the Lake of Fucino was among the richest in Italy, but its exploitation yielded no compensation for these losses. The district had been reduced practically to serfdom. The great wealth it yielded yearly did not stay where it was but emigrated to the capital. A so-called Prince Torlonia owned the 8,000 acres of Fucino, together with a vast expanse of country in the Roman Campagna and Tuscany. . . .

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The beet of Fucino is the raw material for one of the most important sugar factories in Europe, but sugar remains a rare luxury for the peasants who cultivate it. It only enters their houses once a year, in Easter cakes. Almost all the corn of the Fucino goes to the city, where it is used to make white bread and cake and biscuits, and even goes to feed cats and dogs ; but the peasants who grow it have to eat maize bread for the greater part of the year. All the peasants get from the Fucino is starvation wages ; wages that allow them to exist, but not to live.

Silone was the son of a small landowner, who worked almost as hard at farming as the peasants and the landless labourers around him. As a child Silone moved among the poor peasants, went to school with their children, and came early to understand and love them. This love of the poor has remained with him throughout his life, has dominated his actions and given his writings their outstanding quality of sympathy for human suffering.

His education was that of a landowner's son whose parents hoped he would embrace the material and spiritual security of the Church.

I attended junior school at Pescara. On rainy days there were barely enough benches to go round, but on sunny days the classrooms were nearly empty, most of the pupils being engaged in hunting birds or frogs. I passed through the first few grades of senior school at Pescara, as a candidate for the clergy, and remained there up to the earthquake. I completed my schooling in Catholic institutions in various towns in Italy. There were two reasons why I never attended a university. In the first place I was advised not to do so by the doctors, who gave me very few years to live, and in the second place political work left me very little free time.

In spite of the doctors, Silone survived, and this capacity for resisting the probabilities of death may be a physical manifestation of the inner vigour which has maintained him against many disappointments in his search for a true way to mitigate human misery.

His political life absorbed the next ten years. During the war of 1914-18 the peasants of Italy became active in an attempt to rectify the social and economic inequalities which made them poor. Peasant leagues appeared throughout the country ; their aim was to gain an equitable distribution of land. Silone, with

his sympathy for the peasants, could not stand aside from such a movement, so when he was seventeen he joined the local Peasant League, and became the secretary of the Federation of Land Workers of the Abruzzi.

In the same year opposition to the War caused me to join a group of young Socialists, and I was appointed secretary of the Socialist Youth of Rome. A year later I became editor of the weekly *Avanguardia*, which represented the extreme Left of the anti-War movement. In 1922 I was editor of a Trieste newspaper, *Il Lavoratore*, which was three times raided by the Fascists, who were accompanied and protected by the police.

When the Fascists gained power, Silone left Italy, and took up the life of exile which has been the lot of so many great Italian writers, from Dante to Mazzini and beyond. His zeal for political action, however, led him to return, and in 1925 he took up underground work as an agitator. At this time he was a member of the Communist Party. In 1928 he found it virtually impossible to continue his political work without being captured and possibly murdered. He returned to Switzerland, and in Italy he was 'denounced (in absence) to the Fascist Special Tribunal for clandestine political activity'.

He had already begun to question his political activities and the validity of the Marxist theories on which they had been based. By 1930 his ideas had changed so much that he left the Communist Party, and since that time he has styled himself an 'independent Communist'. He has stood aloof from all the Italian political groups, and his denunciation of politicians and political organizations has earned him their hostility.

Since 1930 he has lived most of the time in Switzerland, where he has written a number of books, of which four have been published in England. They are, a series of three novels, *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, and a full-length dialogue on Fascism called *The School for Dictators*.

In discussing Silone's writings, I intend to deal firstly with his three novels, which represent his progress as an individual thinker searching for the values which govern the liberation of man.

Fontamara, his first novel, written during 1930, is intended

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primarily as a simple story to show the life of the poor in Fascist Italy, and, although it is by no means direct propaganda, and has certain interesting undertones of intention, it is much less complex and less elaborately written than his two later works.

Fontamara is a miserable village in the hills above Lake Fucino. Its inhabitants are peasants of the poorest type, 'the heirs to generations of poverty'. They hate the authorities, the landlords, the carabinieri, the townspeople and the Piedmontese. They evade paying taxes, and distrust the government almost by instinct. Nevertheless, the fact that each is the owner of a miserable portion of infertile land makes them cautious and conservative. Their attitude is changed by the series of events described in the story.

The peasants are tricked by a Fascist official into signing a petition asking for the diversion of their stream away from the peasant fields into a piece of land which the *podesta* of the nearest town has just bought cheaply. A number of women go into the town to try to gain redress for their grievance. Once again they are tricked, this time by a lawyer posing as The People's Friend, who persuades them to accept a poor compromise.

Afterwards the village is attacked by Fascist militia, who arrive when the men are in the fields, break up the homes and rape the women. The most conservative and torpid of the villagers are shaken by the series of outrages.

What was quite clear was that the militia had come to Fontamara and raped a number of women. But they had done so in the name of the law and in the presence of a police commissary, and that was not so clear.

At the Fucino they had put up the rents of the smallholders and lowered the rents of the big proprietors. That was clear. But the proposal to do this had been made by the representative of the poor peasants and that was not so clear. . . .

Each one of our misfortunes, examined separately, was not new, for similar misfortunes had often happened in the past. But the way they befell us was new and strange.

The whole thing was absolutely beyond our understanding.

The peasants are finally disillusioned when they realize that the arrangement made for the diversion of the stream means that their fields will be completely dried up because so little water will be left to them.

All the same, no one was resigned to the loss of the water. No one was resigned to the loss of his entire crop. No one could reconcile himself to the prospect of winter without bread or soup.

"If there's no justice against thieves, we've reached the end of all things," said Ponzio Pilato.

"When the law has broken down and the first to violate it are those whose business it is to enforce it, it's time to go back to the law of the people," the old cobbler said one night.

"What is the law of the people?"

"God helps him who helps himself," said Baldissera.

At this time Berardo Viola, a landless peasant, goes to Rome in the hope of earning some money. He falls in with the Mystery Man, a young revolutionary who had once saved the peasants from an *agent provocateur*, and is arrested with him. In prison Berardo tells the Mystery Man of the troubles of the *Fontamarese*, and then sacrifices himself by declaring that he is the Mystery Man. He is tortured to death by the Fascists. The real Mystery Man is set free, and immediately goes to Fontamara, where he provides the peasants with the materials for a duplicated paper to tell the grievances of the country people. The peasants make their newspaper and distribute it in the surrounding villages. The same day Fontamara is invaded and the peasants, except the few who escape into the hills, are massacred.

Fontamara can be considered from two aspects. As a portrayal of the evils of Fascism, it is confident and successful, both artistically and as a representation of factual truth. But as propaganda for a party or for any definite course of action, it is virtually useless, because it is already impregnated with those doubts concerning the rôle of the revolutionary agitator which become so prominent in the later novels. Whether or not Silone intended it, the Mystery Man appears as a bringer of evil to the peasants, as a partner, however unwilling, with the Fascists in the perpetration of their final tragedy. He saves them from the trouble which their enemy, the *agent provocateur*, would have brought them, and precipitates them into an even worse desolation by an action which he should have known would end in tragedy. One feels, in fact, very little kindness for the revolutionary in this instance; all one's sympathy goes to the peasants, ground between the upper and nether millstones of rival systems of politics. *Fontamara* already raises a problem which must sooner

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or later have troubled the conscience of every sincere revolutionary who had a real feeling for the people. How far is the revolutionary justified in leading the people into action which he knows will bring them an immediate increase in suffering, even if he believes that in the long run such action will precipitate their freedom? How much truth is there in the revolutionary casuistry that the people must be induced to rebel against their masters and suffer for their rebellion so that they may be taught the true character of the ruling class and by this means be brought to overthrow its tyranny? The question might be put in the words of the survivors of Fontamara :

After so much strife and anguish and tears, and wounds and blood, and hatred and despair—what are we to do?

It is a question which as yet Silone is content merely to pose rather than to answer, for *Fontamara* is a book concerned first of all with the tragedy of the peasants, and only indirectly with the problems of the revolutionary.

In the two later novels, the revolutionary becomes the central figure, and the complex structure of Italian social life is the background against which is enacted his physical struggle for outward freedom, and the mental struggle through which he develops from a materialist party dogmatist into an individual thinker whose view of society is moral and universal rather than political and sectarian.

Bread and Wine opens with the arrival in the Marsica of the revolutionary Pietro Spina, ill with consumption after months in hiding. A peasant fetches to him a doctor who was at school with him in his youth, and who has temporized with the Fascist regime. Sacca, the doctor, speaks of the disillusionment of his class. His description fits not only Italy, but all countries caught in the toils of a society based on authority and war; Spina's reply has an equally universal application.

"All our life is lived provisionally," he said. "We think that for the time being things are bad, that for the time being we must adapt ourselves, even humiliate ourselves, but that it is all just temporary, and that one day life, real life, will begin. We get ready to die, still complaining that we have only one life, and spend the whole of it living provisionally, waiting for real life to begin. And thus the time passes. Nobody lives in the present. Nobody has any profit from

his daily life. Nobody can say : On that day, on that occasion, my life began. Even those who enjoy all the advantages of belonging to the government party have to live by intrigue, and are thoroughly nauseated by the dominant stupidity. They too live provisionally, and spend their lives waiting."

"One must not wait," said Spina. "In exile one spends one's life waiting too. One must act. One must say : Enough ! from this very day."

"But if there is no liberty ?" said Nunzio Sacca.

"Liberty isn't a thing you are given as a present," said Spina. "You can be a free man under a dictatorship. It is sufficient if you struggle against it. He who thinks with his own head is a free man. He who struggles for what he believes to be right is a free man. . . . Liberty is something you have to take for yourself. It's no use begging it from others."

Through Sacca's arrangements, Spina goes disguised as a priest to the foothills of the Appenines. There, trusted because of his disguise, he is able to see intimately into the lives and minds of the country people. Resting from the hard political struggle, he has leisure to test his ideas and his motives. He begins to doubt the whole conception of life which has dominated his action up to the present time.

In the two girls whom he encounters and who become devoted to him are represented the two influences which attack his beliefs. Bianchina is the desire to enjoy freely the physical, worldly side of life. Cristina is the desire for spiritual fulfilment. Both make him realize how much he has become lost in subservience to political dogma.

Is it possible to take part in political life, to devote oneself to the service of a party, and remain sincere ? he writes in his notebook.

Has not truth, for me, become party truth ? Has not justice for me become party justice ?

Have not party interests ended by deadening all my discrimination between moral values ? Do I, too, not despise them as petty-bourgeois prejudices ?

Have I escaped from the bondage of a decadent Church only to fall into bondage to the opportunism of a party ?

What has become of my enthusiasm of that time ? By putting politics before everything else, before all other spiritual needs, have I not impoverished, sterilized my life ? Has it not meant that I have neglected deeper interests ?

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This is a situation that must inevitably face the revolutionary who has not allowed himself to become completely crushed by political dogma. It is, moreover, a critical situation which, unless it results in the positive assertion of spiritual and moral values, will lead to the eventual inner destruction of any moral or aesthetic sense the revolutionary may possess. The revolutionaries who fail to assert their moral values become the betrayers of the revolution, the Stalins and the Robespierres.

Such changes in attitude are never achieved immediately, nor does an intellectual enlightenment usually result in a sudden change in action, for there are still emotional loyalties which drag heavily on the subject of such a conversion. Thus Spina tries to throw aside his doubts by returning to political action. He finds discontent among the young people of Fossa and tries to convert them to his political creed. Yet in talking to them he shows his lack of faith in the dogmas he still pretends to hold.

There are many distinctions that are distinctions of words only. There are many alliances that are alliances of words only. In no century have words been so perverted from their natural purpose of putting man in touch with man as they are today. To speak and to deceive (often to deceive oneself) have become almost synonymous. So far has this process gone that I, wishing to speak to you sincerely and fraternally, with no other object in mind than that of understanding you and making myself understood by you, if I begin to search for the right words, remain in perplexity, so false, equivocal, hackneyed and compromised they are. Therefore it is perhaps better to keep silent and to trust the silence.

As in *Fontamara*, his attempts at political action end in tragedy for others. A student he urges to work for the party is killed by the militia. Bianchina, whom he recommends to go to Rome, becomes a whore. He himself is discovered and has to escape into the mountains, but Cristina, who follows him for love, falls a prey to the wolves among the mountain snow. In the same way, the physical and spiritual lives are destroyed in the man who is ruled by the abstractions of dogma.

The Seed Beneath the Snow continues Spina's spiritual progress. A large portion of the book is devoted to an intricate and successful description of the corruption and tragedy of the life of the Italian middle class, but as this is still the background

against which Spina's struggle is enacted, I have chosen to ignore it for reasons of space. From a literary criterion, this is the most successful of Silone's books. The structure is more closely integrated, the characterization more rich than in his previous work. There is a greater beauty of imagery and language, and the slightly overdone gruesomeness of the earlier novels is tempered by a more friendly mellowness.

Nearly one half of the book is used to describe the rural society, in which only a few retain their integrity. The rest are too much engrossed in the intrigues necessary for power, or even for safety. Then, against this elaborate background, is introduced Spina's experience as he hid in a miserable donkey's stable on the mountain, told to his grandmother, who has taken him into her own house.

Here, by the devotion of a dumb peasant lad who came every day to sit with him, he realizes the value of companionship, and comes nearer to the poor than he was ever brought by his political actions.

How can I possibly give you an idea, Grandmother, of the simple, silent, deep friendship between us ? I could barely see the dark bulk of his heavy body and hear his deep slow breathing, but there was a certain affinity between his body and the bodies of the other objects in that cave—the donkey, myself, the mice, the trough, the straw, the packsaddle and the broken lantern—a communion, a brotherhood whose discovery flooded my heart with a new feeling which perhaps I should call peace or even happiness. . . . I feel now as if I had never really been myself before, as if I had been playing a part like an actor on the stage, wearing a mask and declaiming prepared speeches. This life and this civilization of ours seem to me a theatrical, conventional, lying sham. . . .

. . . I have come to think that the quiet, the peace, the happiness, the well-being, the homeliness, the companionship which I found in that stable derived from a contact with simple, true, difficult, painful forms of life, immune from the plague of rhetoric.

Spina experiences what is known as a ' change of heart ', transmitted with all the vividness of a mystical experience. He realizes in the symbiotic unity of nature a meaning and a pattern which are expressed humanly in brotherhood and companionship. In observing the processes of nature, he sees, moreover, an earnest of the growth of truth and freedom among men. This is the ' seed beneath the snow '.

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At first I feared that the seed was already dead but, after I had carefully cleared away the earth around it with a straw, I discovered a slender white tongue like a stalk of grass coming out of it. My whole being, my whole heart came to centre about that little seed, Grandmother. I was in despair because I didn't know how to keep it alive : even now I'm not sure that I did the right thing. To keep out the cold and to replace the shelter of the board which I had removed, I covered it with a little earth ; every morning I melted some snow over it to provide it with water and, to give it heat, I breathed on it. That clod of earth with its tiny, weak, exposed yet living, hidden treasure came to hold for me the mystery, the familiarity and the sacredness of a mother's breast. . . . My own existence, I knew, was as precarious and as exposed to danger as that of the seed abandoned beneath the snow, and yet it was as natural, as vital as life itself, not an image, a pretence or an imitation of life, but life itself, at its sorrowful and dangerous source.

Spina's experience is now involved in the discovery of brotherhood. With his grandmother he finds a new relationship based on their common faith in spiritual realities. Then his dumb friend comes to the town where he is hiding. Spina leaves his grandmother's house and joins Infante, the dumb boy, and Simone the Polecat, a peasant who gives them a refuge. With Infante and Simone he discovers a relationship more deep and comradely than any he had ever enjoyed before. He realizes in this why his political activity was futile.

. . . All in all, I must have been acquainted with several thousand persons in the Party more or less and known a few dozen among them a little better. But in fifteen years I never knew a soul as well as I know you and Infante. I used to think it was my fault, but I came to see that the same thing was true of the others. To tell the truth, they didn't hold much with friendship in the Party ; there was something suspicious about it, as if it might engender the formation of cliques and gangs. For this reason I should even rightly admit that friendship, in the true and human meaning of the word, was regarded and despised as a remnant of bourgeois individualism.

Later, Spina flees to a town in the mountains, accompanied by Faustina, a beautiful and intelligent girl who in this book embodies the qualities represented by the two girls in *Bread and Wine*. She represents the union of physical and spiritual happiness and fulfilment. With Faustina he discusses the change that has occurred in his philosophy.

It was more painful for me than I can tell you, Faustina, after I had come back from exile abroad in order to work and fight against the dictatorship, to spend almost a whole year in inactivity here in the country, rusting away, all because I was going through a spiritual crisis. But this much I learned at my own expense : that before we can give something of ourselves to others, we must first possess ourselves. A man who is spiritually a slave cannot work for true freedom. To look after one's own soul no longer seems to me a waste of time or, as I once used to say pontifically, a sign of bourgeois decadence. When all is said and done, there is no better and more necessary occupation than man's effort to know himself and the meaning of his life on earth. Everything else must follow, as the cart follows the horse. I now feel that the two fundamental motives of my existence came out of this spiritual crisis stronger than ever : the rejection of our present social order and attachment to the poor, two motives which are but one. . . . My love for the poor must have come down to me from a previous existence ; I can imagine myself armless and legless but not without my feeling for them. This love for the poor has been my salvation ; were it not for this, Faustina, I might have wound up as a Government orator.

This is Spina's final credo, on which his fate is cast. He has left the abstraction of political dogma, the artificial cage of party practice, and entered upon the intimate reality of direct knowledge between men. On this only can the society he desires be built, patiently and with love.

The change in his ideas is symbolized in the ending of the book. This time Spina asks and gains no sacrifice of others to achieve his objects. The political machine demands its victims, but the loving man gives himself. Spina has planned to leave Italy and live abroad with Faustina, thus achieving the end of his conflict and the gaining of complete physical and spiritual happiness. But Infante commits a murder and Spina lets himself be led away into prison in his place. Thus the man who seeks to save mankind by moral values has a task as much burdened by hardship and self-sacrifice as that of any political martyr who gives himself for the illusions of a mass dogma.

We have seen, both in Silone's life and in his novels, the development of a sense of the reality of moral and spiritual values, and of the futility of any attempt to change society that is not derived from a conception of morality. But, because

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Silone has not been explicit in his novels as to the exact nature of the social programmes he would advocate, we must not consider that he has retired into a mysticism that has no contact with social facts. On the contrary, his realization of the need for a moral basis for social action springs in part from his own experience as a political worker and his ever-present desire for a life which will relieve the poor and the oppressed from their miserable fate.

It is in *The School for Dictators* that we find Silone's social attitude most clearly expressed. Primarily, this book is an analysis of the nature and methods of Fascism, and, as such, although it is probably the best book of its kind, it is not of immediate interest. In this article we are concerned with the glimpses we gain of Silone's view of a free society.

Silone's social creed is essentially and thoroughly libertarian. Elsewhere, he calls himself an 'ethical socialist', but fundamentally his ideas are not different from those of the anarchist.

If I may for one moment abandon the rôle of cynic that I have assumed in these conversations, I will frankly confess that I *only* believe in miracles. Other things I have no need to believe, because I see them. But I believe in the miracle of liberty, although I see all the things that are opposed to it.

It is in such a belief in freedom, irrational because it is above reason, that Silone's creed becomes truly religious. Faith, as well as reason, is necessary for the achievement of harmony among men. In the last resort every great social thinker has found his energy in a faith that went beyond his reasoning powers, in a belief in qualities and potentialities of man for which the material world can afford no proof.

Moral teachings have often been derided by politicians as being unrealistic. Yet it is just because most politicians are not actuated by moral values that their own efforts have been so harmful to the interests of humanity.

. . . a genuine knowledge of social reality does not suffice if it is not supported by a strong moral sense.

It is in fact only by the realization and revelation of the natural laws concerning humanity that social knowledge can be imparted, and only by the spreading of knowledge can communal happiness

be attained. With such knowledge, politics as we know it becomes redundant, for

Is not a certain ignorance of the laws that govern human society at the very basis of all politics ?

Silone's criticism of existing political institutions, whether of the State or of parties attempting to take over the State, is directed towards both their methods and their ends. He attacks the domination of machine and technique, the predominance of the means over the end.

Machines, which ought to be man's instrument, enslave him, the state enslaves society, the bureaucracy enslaves the state, the church enslaves religion, parliament enslaves democracy, institutions enslave justice, academies enslave art, the army enslaves the nation, the party enslaves the cause, the dictatorship of the proletariat enslaves Socialism. The choice and the control of the instruments of political action are thus at least as important as the choice of the ends themselves, and as time goes on the instruments must be expected to become an end for those who use them. Hence the saying that the end justifies the means is not only immoral ; it is stupid. An inhuman means remains inhuman even if it is employed for the purpose of assuring human felicity. A lie is always a lie, murder is always murder. A lie always ends by enslaving those who use it, just as violence always enslaves those who use it as well as their victims. . . .

Technique aims at the mechanical use of men, while liberty considers the human personality as sacred. A technique of the progressive stupefaction of the masses exists. A technique of liberty does not and cannot exist.

Liberty can only arise organically from free companionship among men and the growth of trust and brotherhood. It cannot be imposed from without, but must be gained by each man, individually and in co-operation with his fellows.

On social organization Silone's ideas may be epitomized as, firstly, the use and control of the means of production by the workers themselves, and, secondly, a federalist social structure based on local and functional autonomy.

Socialism means socialisation. Nationalisation, whether partial or total, is not socialism. Why ? Capitalism has separated labour from the ownership of the means of production. Under the feudal system the two were united. Socialism aims at reuniting labour and the

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means of production on the technical and social level that has been made possible by modern industry, taking the latter out of the hands of private individuals and the state and giving it to the labouring community.

In 1942 Silone wrote a statement of his philosophical position, and I cannot do better than leave the final summary of his social beliefs to be spoken therefrom.

The struggle between socialism and fascism will not be decided by war, the truth being that wars in general decide nothing. It may well be that fascism will be conquered by force of arms, and nevertheless will develop in the victor states—perhaps even with a democratic or socialistic mask, under the form of a 'Red fascism'. History is made by men, not by social determinisms, and I confess that I am not pessimistic.

In summing up, I stand for : (1) an integral federalism and (2) an ethical conception of socialism. Federalism is often recommended these days as a penalty for defeated nations. But it would not be a penalty ; it would be a triumph for our cause. As for the ethical conception of socialism, it does not demand a new morality ; there is no question of seeking a new justification for socialism ; all we have to do is to recognize its true potentiality. . . .

We have all heard it said that the masses will not fight except for material things, and hence must always be guided by mediocre ends and mediocre people. I believe, on the contrary, that the masses have rejected the leadership of the democrats and the socialists because it was middling and muddling. If mediocrity were good enough for the masses, the Social Democrats would never have lost their influence over the German workers. It is precisely because the masses suffer from a feeling of mediocrity that they refuse to accept mediocre leaders. The Church won the hearts of the masses in the days when it offered them the boldest and most difficult aims. It lost its spiritual leadership when it became prudent and conservative.

There is still another myth to be refuted. It is that in all countries where the means of expressing opinions are monopolized by the State, men can no longer think freely or boldly. But the truth is quite the contrary ; that the greatest, the most audacious thoughts on liberty have come from nations where liberty had ceased to exist. The human mind will never let itself be transformed into a machine. Human liberty and human dignity are conceptions that will never perish.—*War Commentary, March, 1943.*

Here, as in the rest of Silone's writings, we find a developed social insight which can only be gained by relinquishing the

dogmas of political orthodoxy and rediscovering by individual experience the simple and difficult truths of brotherhood and mutual trust among men, the veritable seed beneath the snow from which will rise the harvest of freedom.

(Note.—Since this article was written, news has come through from Italy that Silone has gone back into political life, joined the Socialist Party and advocated an alliance with the communists. The exact reasons for his returning to this form of action, which he tacitly condemned in his recent books, are not yet apparent, and I have chosen to leave the article as it was written rather than attempt to adapt it to fit actions of whose cause I am unaware. I still consider that what I have written stands good as an interpretation of Silone's writing, and that his subsequent conduct does not necessarily invalidate any of the criticisms of the political attitude which he has made in his books.)

A Note on André Malraux

Walter Allen

You know as well as I do, that life is meaningless. When a man lives alone he cannot help brooding over the problem of his destiny. And death is always there, you see, ahead of him, like . . . a standing proof of the futility of life. What weighs on me is—how shall I put it?—my human lot, my limitations ; that I must grow old, and time, that loathsome thing, spread through me like a cancer, inevitably. Time—there you have it ! D'you see all those damn fool insects making for our lamp, obeying the call of the light ? The termites, too, they obey the law of the ant-hill. . . . I . . . I will not obey.

The passage is from Malraux's novel *The Royal Way*, the speaker the adventurer Perken. Perken, it will be noted, is not only haunted by consciousness of the futility of life and the omnipotence of death, he has also contracted out of human society, he refuses to be an ant. He is not at all a character that the

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Marxist admirers of Malraux's later, better-known novels can conscientiously applaud. He is a solitary and his ethics are those of the fascist ; he is interested in getting money enough to buy machine-guns with which to carve for himself a private empire out of the remoter parts of Siam. He dies, from a gangrenous infection of the leg, crying : ' There is . . . no death. There's only . . . I . . . One finger contracted on his thigh. I who . . . am dying.'

The range of characters permitted to any one novelist is small, and Perken is a typical Malraux character. He is a fighter, he is consumed by a contemptuous hatred of Western industrial society. He is a masochist ; suffering is necessary to him because while he can suffer he knows he is alive. He is a Promethean who has declared war both on human society and on human fate. Above all, he is a death-mystic. He is, in other words, a highly romantic character, of a respectable line of literary ancestors. Dostoievsky, Rimbaud, Gide, his progenitors are legion, and his kin as numerous. He would have qualified, had he not arrived too late in time, for inclusion in Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony*.

But, because he is a creation of M. Malraux, he is a man of action, a man of action on a much grander scale than most of his predecessors and relations. For Malraux himself is rare among novelists in that he not only writes out his personal myth, as it were, he lives it. He has himself explored the archeological remains of Cambodia besides writing a novel about such an exploration ; he has taken part in a Chinese Communist Revolution ; he has flown with the Republican Air Force in Spain. He has, in part at least, lived the novels he has written.

This does not, of course, mean that his novels are necessarily better than those of authors who write of revolutions without having taken part in them. And this is worth stressing because the notion that the novelist must write only out of direct experience has become an absurd fetish. Few novelists can have less in common than Malraux and Henry James, but James's anarchists in *The Princess Cassimassima* are certainly no less convincing than Malraux's revolutionaries and much more convincing as characters in a traditional sense. Nevertheless, the fact that Malraux has lived his novels does give them an altogether unusual power and urgency. Ralph Fox, the best of the English Marxist

critics of fiction, refers in his *The Novel and the People* to Malraux's 'epic stories'. This is to use the word epic in its cinema advertising sense as synonymous with but more dignified than grandiose, expensive or merely lasting a long time. But Malraux is a problem for any critic committed to the doctrine of socialist realism, for more plainly even than most novels his are the expression of a personal myth, of a myth as personal, for instance, as Kafka's or Graham Greene's. To see them as realistic novels is to be defeated at the beginning, as is shown, I believe, by Malraux's own disastrous fate when he attempted to fit this highly individual talent into the Procrustes' Bed of socialist realism.

That Malraux should have become a communist (whether he has remained one I do not know) is perhaps not remarkable. For the dominant character of Malraux's novels is the self-outlawed man, the repudiator, the Promethean. 'In a world in which everyone cheats', says a character in Gide, 'it is the honest man who passes for a charlatan'. If one accepts that view the only logical step is to join the permanent opposition, and the permanent opposition, it may be said, consists of two sections, the criminal, anti-social underworld and the more respectable armies of the Revolution. The kind of revolution does not in itself matter, for like the *status quo* the revolution is a permanent feature of human society, though its manifestations may be temporary and transient, communist in the Western world, Trotskyite in the Soviet Union. Gide himself, through his characters at any rate, has allied himself at various times with both sections. Céline, who has put forward the theory of society as an organized racket with greater power than any other writer of our time, seems to align himself with the underworld. Malraux, after *The Royal Way*, in which he patronized the forces of imperialist exploitation, joined the revolution.

But Malraux threw in his lot with the revolution on his own terms. Perken, in *The Royal Way*, is succeeded by Garine in *The Conquerors*, his first novel of the Chinese communist revolution. Garine's position is unequivocal; he's not at all Mr. Harry Pollitt's idea of a comrade.

I do not love mankind, I do not even love the poor people, those for whom I am going to fight. One thing is certain, that I utterly detest the middle class into which I was born.

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As for the poor people for whom he is going to fight, 'I am well aware that as soon as we have triumphed together, they will become contemptible'. He says later, 'There can be no strength, there cannot even be any real life, without the conviction, without the obsession of the futility of everything'. On this the Marxist comment is: 'Gariné's motivating force is the desire to lose himself in a struggle that is greater than his own subjective problems.' That may be so; it would be at least as accurate to say that for Gariné revolutionary activity is the means by which his subjective problems become exteriorized. The revolution, in other words, is the means by which a personal myth can become satisfactorily realized; one can see the same mechanism working in our own English middle-class communists, even though their hatred of the father may take no more dramatic a form than carrying a banner in a May Day procession. In *The Royal Way* there is an apposite discussion between Claude and Perken on the subject of masochists.

"It's with *themselves* they're fighting," says Perken. "A man ekes out his imagination as best he can, not as he chooses. Even the stupidest professional knows the gulf that lies between her and the man who goes in for that sort of thing. Do you know the name they give abnormals? 'Cerebrals,' they call them."

And, significantly, at the root of the intransigence both of Perken and Grabot, the man who 'spared no pains to keep his liberty of action', is sexual abnormality.

This, it must be emphasized, is not at all a criticism of Malraux's novels. It is merely to state what Malraux's novels are really *about*. The framework of the stories, the Chinese communist revolution, for instance, is merely the machinery, to use the excellent eighteenth-century word, which enables the myth to be played out. It is Malraux's great distinction as a novelist, as it is Gide's, to have shown us the abnormal with the courage of his abnormality and pursuing it to the end. To anyone brought up in the romantic tradition, brought up to believe, for instance, that Milton was one of the Devil's party without knowing it, this must seem heroic; and it is far too late in the day for us in England and America to try to detach ourselves artificially from the romantic tradition. To follow the personal myth no matter where it leads remains the novelist's most important task.

Malraux does this, it seems to me, most triumphantly in *Storm in Shanghai*, to use the cheap English title of *La Condition Humaine*. Man's fate—to die with dignity in an unequal struggle, though to resist death to the last possible moment: that I take to be Malraux's theme. That, and the essential aloneness of the human being. But the main emphasis is on dignity; it is to give the workers dignity that Kyo is a communist, and dignity he defines as the opposite of humiliation. It is dignity in the face of death that enables Katow in the great heroic moment of the novel to give his potassium cyanide to his two Chinese comrades and himself suffer burning alive in the furnace of the railway engine.

The role of Marxism in all this is to give validity to the concept of dignity. 'Marxism', Kyo remembers his father's words continually, 'isn't a doctrine, it's a form of will-power'. Or, as Kyo himself paraphrases it:

Marxism contains both the idea of inevitability and a worship of the power of the will. And whenever I see the first being allowed to predominate over the second, I am uneasy.

But there is another strand in the fabric of the book, the theme represented by Kyo's father, Gisors, and to some degree his is the role of chorus. A Professor of Philosophy, expelled from his chair for dangerous thought, the mentor of a whole generation of revolutionary students, he has taken refuge in opium. His comment to Kyo's wife, after the failure of the revolution and the death of Kyo, is disconcertingly opposed to the attitudes of Malraux's men of action.

'You can go on tricking life for a long time', he says, 'but in the end it converts you into what you were intended to be. Every old man is an admission of defeat, believe me, and if old age is often so empty, it is because so many of the elderly are themselves empty and have concealed the fact. But that in itself is unimportant. Men should be able to comprehend that there is no reality but that worlds of contemplation exist—either with or without opium—where all is vain.'

It should be noted that Malraux himself holds the balance between all his characters and the views they express in word and action. I do not see in Chen, for instance, the symbol of the

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inefficacy of terrorism that some Marxist critics have read into him. And Kyo himself has said of Gisors :

“ Opium plays an important part in my father’s life, but I sometimes wonder whether opium determines his life for him or if it bears out certain forces that cause him uneasiness. . . . ”

Important words, since one might well ask of Kyo or of Malraux himself whether revolution determines his life for him or bears out certain forces that cause him uneasiness.

It is the presence of Gisors, with his expression of passiveness, of contemplation, to counter-balance the fevered action of Chen, that gives *Storm in Shanghai* its majestic equipoise. It makes it the totality of one man’s insight into the human condition, a terrifying insight because based on a profound belief in the meaninglessness of life and yet in the end triumphantly heroic, a modern expression of that order of courage that in the past has found voice in such diverse works as the ‘ Malden ’ fragment, *Samson Agonistes* and *Prometheus Unbound*. It is, quite simply, a great novel. That it happens to be set in a communist revolution is entirely fortuitous.

I have said nothing of *Days of Hope* since it seems to me that little of Malraux’s real talent finds expression there. Effective as journalism in 1938, it is all but unreadable to-day. It represents the melancholy result of a writer of genius trying to cramp his genius into the confines of a party aesthetic. But one thing is certain, a romantic novelist of the calibre of Malraux is hardly likely to be satisfied for long by the formula-writing demanded by Socialist Realism. This would seem to be confirmed by Mr. Edward Sackville-West’s report, in a recent number of *Horizon*, on Malraux’s most recent novel, written during the German occupation of France. Unfortunately, this work, the edition of which was limited even in France, is all but unobtainable by English readers, and further discussion of Malraux must wait until it is more readily available.

Realism in the Modern Spanish Novel

Arturo Barea

Although a strand of ruthless realism belongs to the fabric of Spanish literature from its very beginnings, the modern realistic novel has developed tardily in Spain, just as tardily as the modern society which is its soil.

Throughout the nineteenth century the country had remained almost untouched by the industrial revolution and by the social, political and ideological changes which swept Europe in its wake. Behind the barrier of the Pyrenees, there was no rapid growth of a town bourgeoisie and proletariat, such as gave stimulus and breadth to the sociological novels of Balzac, Zola and Dickens ; there was no sudden breakaway from a self-contained feudal society, such as bred the atmosphere which surrounded Turgenev and Tolstoi. Spain had its liberal movement of the 'sixties and 'seventies, important enough, since it strove to incorporate the stagnant country in the stream of European intellectual and political life ; but in the petrified, stratified Spanish society it affected only a thin layer of the people. Its most important offspring was a cultural movement at war with the ruling clergy and their educational system, at war, above all, with the deadly illiteracy and ignorance which existed even among the 'literate' upper classes and isolated the intelligentsia.

The novelist of Spanish nineteenth-century liberalism was Benito Pérez Galdós who wrote as an educationalist, trying to show the Spaniards their own past and present through a long series of historical and topical novels and so to help the 'New' against the forces of the 'Old'. It was the nearest approach to modern realism in that period of Spanish literature. Galdós based his books on conscientious research and planned each of them as a cross-section of society ; also, their language was fairly simple and closer to the spoken word than the prevailing rhetorical or sentimental style. But Galdós was an abstract thinker, idealist and teacher in his criticism of the paralysing influence of the Spanish Catholic Church, of the military caste, of the new political wirepullers and their abuse of power, of

ignorance and of misery. His realistic scenes were illustrations of his arguments. The argument was usually interesting and always important ; the illustrations were often moving and always faithful. But those books—with the exception of the novel *Doña Perfecta*—failed to transmit the sense of a living, changing reality : they were works of thought rather than of art.

The literary generation following on Galdós (and the other novelists of his era with their descriptions of rural Spain, more amiable, more limited and less rebellious than Galdós) is called the Generation of '98, because those who belonged to it were marked, in their intellectual growth, by the impact of Spain's spectacular defeat in the Cuban War of 1898. It seems to me tragically characteristic that every discussion of modern Spanish literature must inevitably go back to this starting point, even if the period under discussion is the last decade.

The defeat of '98 meant more for the life of Spain than the loss of the last remnant of her American empire. It showed up the state of administration, army and navy, the make-believe policy of the rulers, the hollowness of the traditional ideas of grandeur, the disastrous financial situation, the mismanagement of the country's rich natural resources, the waste of men and material, the lack of modern equipment. It focused the intellectual forces of all those who did not sink into lethargy and bitterness, on the underlying causes—and on their cure. The young men of that generation had to grapple with the shock they had received at the beginning of their adult life, in the knowledge that they shared the shock with their whole country. For a quarter of a century, it was to be the mainspring of the work of the writers among them.

Only one of the leaders of the Generation of '98 was a novelist : Pío Baroja. His endless series of novels dominated the whole period from 1898 to the 'thirties through their sheer bulk and their consistent political tinge ; they were the only relentlessly realistic novels, within their limits, which Spain produced during that time.

Ask any Spaniard who has an idea of the literature of his country about modern realistic novelists, and he will say, without hesitation : ' There's Pío Baroja '. Then he will ponder, say two or three names, and scrap them, either because the authors are not really important or because their novels are

limited to erotical realism. If you prod his memory by saying that you are interested in realistic novels with a social or political shade, he may produce the name of Ramón J. Sender. Sender began to publish novels in the later 'twenties ; Baroja was already a writer in 1898 ; he still writes and publishes, though in Falangist Spain. This fact will indicate the span—not, of course, the quality and depth—of Baroja's work.

Pío Baroja is a Basque, which is important for the understanding of his attitude to Spanish society. The Basque country is the region of Spain where modern industry meets with a pre-feudal, patriarchal peasant democracy. Both were, and still are, in opposition to the central bureaucracy with its seat in Madrid, and in opposition to the old ruling castes. When he was a boy in San Sebastian, Baroja saw the last clashes of the Carlist Wars. To quote the essayist Ramón Gómez de la Serna :

As a child, he witnessed the bombardment of the Carlists and he saw in passing a poor fellow clad in a cassock painted with flames, on his way to the gallows, surrounded by priests and flagellants. These two experiences turned him against society for all his life.

Resentful, gruff, almost boorish, with a sharp eye for all things distorted by that society which he had come to hate, and with a lasting contempt for the abuses of the Spanish Church (that poor sinner's last garment, and the flagellants accompanied by chanting priests !), he came to Madrid. The defeat of '98 ? The quest for a New Spain ? One seemed obvious, the other utopian to the young writer. He wrote his novels about life in that society which he resented, even though he did not think it worth his while to fight against it.

Those novels of Pío Baroja were a new thing for Spain, in their approach and in their style. They had nothing of the moral purpose of the books of Galdós. Their heroes were isolated rebels, cranks, social misfits, outcasts. He followed them through a maze of accidental experiences, he set down their arguments, their reading, their meals, their casual conversations. Everything was described sharply, in a jerky, deliberately un-beautiful style and short, rough sentences, with a wide knowledge of odd human behaviour and no effort at insight. In Baroja's books, things happened to happen as they did, but they were never inevitable, they had no sense, not even the tragic sense of senselessness. ' This is life in your society ', he seemed to say, ' so what ? '

At first it was stimulating after too much uplift, romance and cloying beauty. It provoked polemics and sharpened the edge of social observation. Then it turned flat. It was always the same story, however varied the incidents. The implied criticism of a social and political system which produced those misfits and accidental catastrophes only repeated itself ; it never deepened, even when the first twenty-five years of the new century brought stirring changes beneath the rigid surface of the regime. The anarchist movement—Baroja had often described the lone-wolf anarchist and conspirator—broadened and, in one of its wings, became a trade-union movement of unskilled workers. The socialist trade unions of Castile raised the living standard of the skilled craftsmen in the city trades, the progressive educationalists were hard at work to direct the growing hunger for knowledge and books among people who at long last had more leisure hours in which to read, somewhat higher wages to spend. The capital changed, it was no longer mainly the Court, the Government, the centre sought by would-be careerists. But Pío Baroja's books, his realistic method, remained unchanged.

For a time, when the oppressive measures of Primo de Rivera's futile military dictatorship heightened the political awareness of the Spanish public and increased its demand for free criticism, Baroja's novels were read more avidly and by a larger number of readers. They were sharp, they were outspoken, they expressed a resentment of the same powers which supported the dictatorship and the Monarchy, but they were also disappointing. It was precisely in those years of the 'twenties, when a new reading public from the ranks of the working classes turned to his novels, that Baroja's realism began to lose its essential pre-requisite, that of dealing with a significant part of social reality.

He was still writing about his men outside the old and the new society, about his aimless free-thinkers and lonely rebels, about people who could not and would not adjust themselves to their surroundings. And those heroes of his still had their counterparts in reality. But their function had changed. When Baroja began to write, his principle of selection of heroes and stories was tantamount to a protest against and a challenge to the old social system. On the eve of the Republic, when strong popular currents among the Spaniards moved towards a social as well as

cultural and political reorganization, the same selective principle became a protest against both the old and the new forces. Soon it became a blind alley. Even the sharpest point of Baroja's polemical realism, that which was turned against the rule of the Spanish clergy and the doctrines of the Church itself, was blunted when he argued it instead of showing how the moral contradictions of the system worked in the mind of his characters. In 1936—the year in which the Civil War broke out—Baroja published a book called *The Priest of Monleón*, a continuation of an earlier novel: it showed the slow spiritual disintegration of a priest who cannot believe in the faith which would make his vows real, but it showed it merely through the books he read. It petered out into empty disgust. The book had no more than the outer trappings of realism.

Pío Baroja spent the years of the Civil War in Paris, and then returned to a Madrid ruled by Falange and the Germans. In 1939 he published a novel entitled *Laura, or The Incurable Loneliness*. (This is the last novel by him I have been able to read.) It is to some extent political, since it describes the Odyssey of a Spanish bourgeois family during the Civil War from the angle of the anti-republicans. The male members of the family are shown as fighters in the ranks of the rebels, or as victims of Republican persecution, or as anonymous heroes of the Fifth Column. The women, whose story carries the book, are depicted in their flight and exile. And in spite of this theme with its wide possibilities, the novel is striking only through its lack of strength. Baroja's old pattern of bizarre and atrabilious individuals mixing with vapid, colourless figures is there, his old technique of a fluent dialogue is there. That is all. It remains doubtful whether the author knows anything about the inner life of those people, and even whether he cares about it. Thus the book is unimportant as a 'slice of life' and unconvincing as a work of art, though it is interesting as a specimen of Baroja's emasculated realism.

Now, Baroja had never been a great artist. But it had been his achievement to let fresh air into the Spanish novel of the turn of the century. He had shocked people into seeing the surface of things clearly, as in a photograph, and no longer as in a colossal painting of the historical school or in an idyllic lithograph; he had brought a real dialogue, real people and an everyday landscape into Spanish prose writing. In this way, he had forced the

imaginative writers into deeper levels. But when that surface of everyday things had been seen clearly, without the light of interpretation and without the glow of the life beneath them, his tricks of surface photography lost their original power. His two-dimensional reality became unreal. For better or for worse—and I believe for better—we can no longer perceive reality through the medium of a novel, unless it makes us see the interplay of forces, the inner life of people, the third dimension, as it were.

The most anti-realistic writer of the elder generation of Spanish modernists, the absolute artist of the group of '98, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, gave this sense of reality to his readers in a few novels which he wrote at the end of his literary career, in the years preceding the coming of the Spanish Republic. They are an odd interlude in this development of literary realism in Spain, and they played a part in the great release of popular feeling which swept away the Spanish Monarchy.

In 1926 Valle-Inclán published a novel which seemed to break with his own tradition of poetical prose and imagery. It was a fantastic sketch of a civil war in an imaginary country—closely modelled on Mexico—with a welter of Whites, Indians and half-castes, and a hero, Tirano Banderas (whose name gives the book its title), who was cruelty and cunning incarnate. The book had a nightmare atmosphere. Its language was an extremely skilful mixture of Spanish and of Latin-American idioms. Measured by its plot, personages and language, the novel seemed to have nothing to do with realistic writing. Yet it had the power to evoke the old Mexico of guerrilla chieftains and *pronunciamentos* with greater force than any faithful reportage. It gave a glimpse of the obscure forces behind the political struggles of the country during that period, it showed the misery of the natives, and it revealed the empty minds of adventurers turned politicians. There was the figure of the Spanish ambassador, a grimly satirical portrayal, and at the same time an uncanny likeness of envoys who had gained for themselves an unenviable fame in the American countries. The burlesque and improbable tragi-comedy was imaginative realism on a new plane.

Valle-Inclán's next attempt to use this literary form had far greater importance. In 1927 and 1928 he published the two parts of an historical novel called *El Ruedo Ibérico* (The Spanish

Bullring). Those were the years after the inglorious collapse of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, when the whole country was caught in the political and intellectual upheaval which led, with irresistible force, to the fall of the Spanish Monarchy. Valle-Inclán had never belonged to any political party or group; he had always been a lonely rebel; for the greater part of his life he had proclaimed his attachment to the 'traditional' values, to the anti-bourgeois and anti-plebeian ideals of the defeated Carlist Movement. Now he ranged himself with the intellectuals who wanted the coming of a democratic republic, because they saw in it the only hope of liberation from the sterile, destructive obscurantism of the ruling classes. Valle-Inclán was too much of a fighter not to wish to attack the Monarchy directly.

Throughout his literary work he had used the reign of Queen Isabel II, the grandmother of Alfonso XIII, as a background and frame for his favourite figment, the Marquis of Bradomín, hero of a series of magnificent love-stories. The Bradomín-cycle had been anything but political; yet through its half-baroque and half-romantic episodes there ran unobtrusively a political thread, the fight between the old Carlist aristocracy and the vulgar, gimcrack court of the Queen. Although in political terms the Carlist Movement stood for anti-Liberalism, Absolutism and the secular power of the Catholic clergy, its adversaries by no means stood for liberty of thought or social progress, but rather for a sham parliamentarism and the new wealth. Valle-Inclán, the 'hidalgo', hated that particular atmosphere of the Isabelline period and its heirs in the Spanish society of his time. He had made his art a protest against them. Now, when he wanted to expose the weak and corrupt monarchy of Alfonso XIII, he fell back on the older epitome of a corrupt monarchy; he wrote about the bigoted, licentious court of Isabel II, and every twist of the tale, every portrait of an aristocratic playboy or a political general had a double life, in the past and the present.

If any proof were needed to show that the social elements which go into the making of the Spanish Right have become fossilized, preserved in an existence outside the social evolution of the country, this novel would provide it. Isabel's court, made to come alive with a shameless and cruel realism, in a language which outdoes that of the picaresque novels, is a likeness—in period dress—of the court of Alfonso XIII. The aristocratic

young men-about-town whom Valle-Inclán described in the costume of 1850 and 1860, in coffee-houses, Andalusian manors and drunken adventures, were portraits of aristocratic playboys of the 'twenties; they are portraits of young gentlemen in Falangist blue shirts as we have come to know them in the 'thirties and 'forties. The blustering, ambitious and bibulous generals who provoked one abortive military rising after the other under the reign of Isabel II, in a bid for political power, were portraits of the generals who tried to extricate the Spanish Monarchy from the defeats into which they had led it in the 'twenties, and they are portraits of the generals who dragged Spain into the carnage of the Civil War and made the world grin at their expectorations before the microphone.

This historical novel does not pretend to be conventional realism. It is purposely extravagant in its language. It is a grand caricature of the past. But it has the effect of a realistic picture of the present for which it was written, because it seems to lay bare its inner structure. When it was published it gave the literary *coup de grâce* to the reign of the Bourbon dynasty in Spain. But it was the end of the literary development of a highly individual artist, not the beginning of a new stage in the development of the realistic novel. Only its author might have been able to carry forward his experiments in the new medium. Other writers had to find their own forms of a realism which would have a similar power to release thoughts and emotions, as the *Ruedo Ibérico* had at a moment of high political tension.

Valle-Inclán died, after a lingering illness, on the eve of the Civil War whose artificers might seem a grim mirage of his realistic nightmares. The social movements which were its underlying causes were alien to his art and comprehension. Another, younger writer was capturing them in a different form of realistic fantasy: Ramón J. Sender.

Sender began to publish articles and books in the middle of the 'twenties. One of the early blurbs of his best-known novel, *Seven Red Sundays*, called its technique 'anti-intellectual and anti-literary'—meaning that it failed to conform to any of the approved literary standards of those years. Indeed, Sender made his way outside the cliques and sets which dominated the intellectual life of Spain. The son of Aragonese farmers, he came to Madrid to study Law, dropped his studies, worked for his living,

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and only barely escaped being arrested for his revolutionary political activities. He served as a conscript soldier in Morocco through the worst years of the Riff War. After his return to civil life, he stayed in contact with the Anarchist movement and worked for a time as a correspondent for the organ of the Barcelona Anarcho-Syndicalists, *Solidaridad Obrera*. He served a prison sentence for his political work against Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. His first novel, *Imán*, dealt with the Moroccan War, his second, *El Viento en la Moncloa* (The Wind in the Moncloa), with the jail. They appeared in the last years of the doomed monarchy, and so were part of the popular current of resentment and rebellion.

During the first years of the Republic—years of high hopes and of bitter disillusionment, when it became clear that the change of the political system was not in itself a change of the social structure—Sender was obsessed with the human and social problem of the Spanish worker, which found its most violent expression in the Anarchist and Anarcho-Syndicalist movements. He wrote about it in the form of straight reportage and in the form of a novel.

Early in 1933 an old Andalusian Anarchist proclaimed 'Libertarian Communism' in the miserable little village of Casas Viejas. His idea was that the Civil Guard should give up its arms and that all men should work the land which had belonged to the rich, in a community of brothers. The Government, in its nervous fear of Anarchist risings, sent military and police forces against the village. Twenty-five workers were killed, their houses were burnt. The local conflict shook the country, it became a slogan and a symbol. Sender wrote a passionate factual account: *Viaje a la Aldea del Crimen* (Journey to the Village of the Crime).

He wrote about the individual and social, material and spiritual forces which drove men and women into violent action, while they dreamed of human freedom, in the novels *Siete Domingos Rojos* (Seven Red Sundays), and *La Noche de las Cien Cabezas* (The Night of the Hundred Heads).

In his search for the 'truth of living humanity', as he called it, he moved away from Anarchism, at least intellectually. He went to Soviet Russia and came back with a changed vision of the role of individuals and of organized action in the social

struggle. Perhaps because his new political notions were at war with his emotional values, he changed his literary form. Apart from two books on the Soviet Union—social reportage—he wrote an historical novel, *Mr. Witt en el Cantón* (Mr. Witt among the Rebels), which earned him the Spanish National Prize for Literature in 1935, and a study of the life and mind of Santa Teresa de Ávila.

And then the Civil War broke out. Sender's wife was executed by Falangists. He was with the Republican Army in the trenches. Still during the war he wrote a book of reportage and propaganda, *The War in Spain*, which is curiously inanimate, as though he had been numbed by the shock. In his exile in Mexico he has been writing novels of nostalgia for his youth in the uplands of Aragon.¹

This outline of Ramón J. Sender's life and work might easily suggest that his novels would be, in the first stage autobiographical reportages, in the second stage 'proletarian' or 'social' realism confined to descriptions of poverty, injustice and revolutionary action. In fact, however, they are the first modern Spanish novels of an imaginative realism. In them, the surface of things and beings is clearly observed and rendered, but it is not more real than the emotions of the individuals; both are fused, or rather, both are fusing into that human reality which is the only one Sender seeks (as he says himself in his preface to *Seven Red Sundays*), and the human reality includes the social struggle.

Sender's first novel, though intensely moving—particularly for those who, like myself, have shared the outward and inward experience it describes—is still comparatively near to a surface realism. The substance of the book is taken from the notes the author made during his military service, and he claims in a dedicatory passage that his imagination had found very little to add. Yet already there are many instances in which the 'real' things, the things seen and sensed by his personages, are a continuation of their inner life and symbols for a deeper reality.

The novel is simple. It is the story of a village blacksmith who is given the nickname of *Imán*, 'Magnet', because in his smithy he seemed to attract magnetically all pieces of red-hot iron

¹ *A Man's Place and Chronicle of Dawn*. Only after writing this essay, have I had occasion to see a new novel written in exile, *Dark Wedding*, which seems a return to Sender's emotional, symbolist realism of an earlier stage.

which could have hurt him, and because later as a conscript soldier in the Moroccan campaign he seems to attract trouble, misfortune and hurts. Poor Viance, the 'Magnet', blunders through dirt, danger and pain, through fighting and rout. He escapes alive, but he is battered and bruised in the most obscure depth of his mind. When he goes home after three years of active service he finds in the place of his village an artificial lake, a new water reservoir. He has lost his last refuge, his tenuous roots in the only life which makes sense to him. He will drift into the big city, like the other homeless workers, not knowing if and when he may find work. Helpless and humiliated, he listens to a music-hall singer who struts on the squalid platform of the canteen, his own war medal pinned to her bosom, and sings a patriotic ditty ending with 'Viva España !' (The title under which the English version of the book was published in America—*Pro Patria*—fits the bitterness behind the detached account, but not the simplicity of its hero.)

This tale had the strength to move its Spanish readers and to make their resentment and rebellion more articulate, because it showed, through the mental life of that simple brute of a soldier, the senseless suffering of a whole conscript army led to the slaughterhouse by greedy, ambitious and often inept generals. But it also shocked and put off many readers at the beginning, because they were used to a more pleasing, less harassing form of the realistic novel. Also, the less sophisticated readers had to readjust their minds before they were able to accept as 'literature' something which was so familiar to them. I have heard people who read *Imán* shortly after its publication say : 'All right, it's quite true what he says, but I could have written that book myself. There isn't anything new in it.' They only confirmed what Sender himself wrote in his introduction to *Imán* : 'Simply and truthfully, this book tries to tell the tragedy of Morocco, as every one of the soldiers who together with me went through that campaign could have seen it.' Yet there was something new in it ; it was the only book published while the King and the generals responsible for the disaster of Morocco were still in power, which touched the recesses of the minds of ordinary soldiers, not only their physical sufferings and rebellious thoughts. It gathered strength, instead of losing it after the first sensation.

Sender's novel was originally published by a small firm with Anarchist leanings, which had been founded by three almost penniless revolutionaries, at a time when two of them were serving prison sentences for political offences against the dictatorship. This fact was in itself enough to mobilize the orthodox book trade against the intruding publishers and their book list. In addition, Sender stressed his independence from any literary school or set, and disclaimed any aesthetic ambition in his writing. (This was a protest against the attitude of the artist who rejected the 'dreary' workers' movements and wrote for the select minority which was supposed to possess the monopoly of aesthetic values.) The result of all this was that *Imán* was studiously ignored by the greater part of the Press and most of the literary professionals, and that its circulation was restricted, until the political atmosphere of the first years of the Republic made social realism with a Left tinge not only acceptable, but even fashionable.

In the early 'thirties *Imán* was reprinted in cheap mass editions. It was then that it made its mark, precisely because it was no longer topical. The primary targets of the bitter criticism provoked by the Moroccan campaign had disappeared from the public scene, together with the old regime—for the time being it seemed as though the progressive Government would successfully destroy the political power of the army caste; Morocco was appeased, the colonial war a thing of the past, a historical factor in the downfall of the monarchy. Now, the story of the perpetual victim, the 'Magnet', acquired a new significance: it became a symbol for the anguished, numb struggle of the men at the bottom of the social pit. It revealed the state of mind of people—and there were many thousands of them—who were bound to drift into apathy, or else to seek shelter in the dream of a brotherhood of mankind, escape in desperate violence, and warmth in the close community of the Anarchist movement.

But by that time Sender himself had moved further along the road in his intellectual concepts and his conscious art. The work which embodies his mature symbolist realism was *Seven Red Sundays*.

It is the story of a group of revolutionary workers, Anarchists, who direct a strike, sabotage acts, and an abortive insurrection provoked by a clash with the police force. The year 1932 was

filled with such stories, which seemed to justify the resistance of the privileged classes against the social reorganization timidly attempted by the Coalition Government of the new Spanish Republic, and the acquiescence of the moderate progressives in police measures as violent as the acts that preceded them. It was easy to exclaim against the Anarchists. Sender undertook to make them real to the others, so real that the reader would 'undergo a new emotional experience' (in the words of Sender's preface) and understand what was happening in the minds of those political outcasts. He did it by speaking through the thoughts and sensations of his Anarchists, and by conveying the atmosphere in which they moved, the logic of their chaotic actions.

Despite the importance of the Anarchist movement for the social development of Spain, what little there had been written about it in Spanish literature created two stereotypes: that of the anti-social, inhuman criminal who revels in violence for violence's sake, and that of the inspired fanatic. Baroja scattered vigorous but superficial portraits of Anarchists all over his books, from his beginning as a writer to his end. In his early novels they are mysterious conspirators who are sent out from their headquarters at Geneva and in passing tell the story of their terrorist exploits; in *Laura* his Anarchists of the Civil War are simply men who carry red-and-black scarves slung round their throats, shoot bourgeois against the wall, and rape well-brought-up girls.

Sender is the first Spanish writer to show the Anarchists in their life of action and their life of the mind, talking to their girl-friends, discussing their theories, dealing with a police-spy, and doubting themselves. Some of them are very primitive, according to the standards of our civilization, and their minds work in complicated images and associations; others are educated, and intellectually so organized that their reactions and thoughts are deliberate and articulate, even when they kill human beings in pursuit of an idea. The author confesses in his preface that he wants to show the generous impulses, the warm humanity behind the blundering, destructive actions of Spanish Anarchists; he asks his readers 'to ponder the enormous disproportion between what the Spanish revolutionary masses have given and continue to give, and what they have gained'. But in his book he never argues this case, except through the feelings and

Arturo Barea

reactions of the people whom he creates. They may think gay thoughts while keeping watch at the bier of a comrade, they may have criminal urges while making love, poetical associations while firing off a pistol, they may spin out tedious pseudo-philosophical arguments while feeling bewildered and tired. Each of them is a reality in himself, a vital human being caught in the universal conflict with the world of objective reality. Their minds mirror the society which bred them, each from a different individual angle, expressed through personal images.

One of the Anarchists is waiting to be shot by his guards 'while trying to escape capture', as the time-honoured phrase has it. He looks at his handcuffs and begins to repeat to himself a phrase which emerged from his childhood memories: 'Must I really go into the geometry class with hands like these?'

Thus symbol and realistic detail constantly change place in Sender's book, vesting the limited reality with a universal significance. When the Anarchist leader finds that his romantic love affair with a colonel's daughter is annihilated by its inner impossibility, this turns into a symbol for social cleavage and the incurable loneliness of the individual. The heroic violence of the strike leaders implies the social futility of all violent individual acts. As the mind of a revolutionary mystic unfolds, it reveals the hopeless frustration of all saintly mystics in their dealings with society. The defeat of the insurgents with all its tragic and sordid details turns into a diagnosis of the malady of the social life which made them what they are.

In the end the book imposes the emotional conviction that the world, out of joint, cannot be healed by Anarchist action, but must be healed by all of us, working singly and jointly with some of the fire of abnegation which burns in those blundering fighters for human freedom.

The Civil War and its mute continuation during this war in the minds of all Spaniards have put Spanish writers face to face with a reality which has not yet been shaped in works of art. What there is of prose writing is (at least as far as it is known to me) either reportage or autobiography—self-discovery—or a flight into counterfeits of a lost reality. Most of us are still struggling to adjust ourselves to the world around us and in us, which we have learnt to sense and see as never before. But

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presently, I believe, this shock, this spiritual wound, will be turned into creative art. The hunger of the Spanish people for books which would have the power to clarify their minds and illuminate their actions is so great that novels of an imaginative realism—novels fusing the reality of social life and the inner mind, of emotions and the surface of things—will have to grow, beyond the start Sender has made. The writers will find their individual forms; but they would impoverish themselves if they were to keep aloof from the struggle to shape our present and future.

To quote Arthur Koestler's words at the last international P.E.N. Congress :

The artist is no leader ; his mission is not to solve, but to expose, not to preach, but to demonstrate. . . . The healing, the teaching and preaching he must leave to others ; but by exposing the truth by special means unavailable to them, he creates the emotional urge for healing.

POETRY

The Unborn

KATHLEEN RAINE

I lose your love. And yet, this grief my glory
Since bearing sorrow I bear love and keep love
Great and endurable alike in pain as joy.

But these, who have no voices to upbraid me
Lose all, who desired, in our desire, to be.
Their loved homecoming was our possibility
I childless end life that the world began.

Their hope was in dawn's first bird, parting the light
With nearing wings leaving the trembling sea,
And all creation moved with love, that they should be.

Eyes violet and sweet they now will never open
Upon the stars we saw in love together,
Or, petal by petal, wonder at the first flower,
And look up through the green mysterious tree
Into the sky, profound to infancy.

They will not hear the sea in their delicate shells,
Never run on the sands with happy feet,
Watch the waves break, singing,
And, like you, delight in water birds, at rest and sailing.

Watching Through A Flying Bomb Raid

JULIAN SYMONS

The angry noises in the night outside
Break free of truth as does a story : they
Light up the awful darkness in which play
All the ideas that we wish to hide.
Beside me someone stirs in sleep : his face
Is locked and vacant, but within his mind
Strong forces try to raise an unknown blind
As he turns over, says *I know the place.*

In these ironic watches of the night
I think of one who, virtuous and good
Ordered his daylight actions, unafraid,
That when light died his hand
And that behind all virtue is
And animal look, the blank

A Picture in a Frame

 NICHOLAS MOORE

" You have your hand upon the frame ", I said,
" A frame made by the hand of Time. You yourself
Have formed the image as you would have it,
Recklessly, yourself framed with boredom and despair,
Despite the gold and eloquence of your hair."
The girl turned with the picture in her hand.
" And can I speak to you, who are a part
Of this despair ? Who read my eyes ?
Who cast your look upon my hair ? "

" Yet I have made
No offer and no promise, no advance
Toward that point which you dread."

" Ice-cold
You seem, and yet you seem to like
Me, Mr. Philosopho ! "

“ I like the way
You hold your body, the way you
Appear to dance always, to be gay, and yet
Know the world for what it is. I like
What is real in you.”

“ And what is real
Beyond the colour of my hair, and the family
Face ? What is real beyond the bizarre
Imaginations I have ? ”

I knew this man who was myself,
Staring at the pretty hair, the long arms.
I knew the viciousness of my defeat
Who could see and yet not see : who, whatever I did,
Must fail. For there is no retreat
From the violence of the war's alarms,
Nor from the struggle within oneself.
There is nothing but the head
With which to form imaginations.

I remember Sappho and her Muse,
How she would pray to a goddess to keep her young,
The mirror held to show the ravages
In her eyes and face. O Aphrodite !

“ To have a young and pretty Muse,
The envy of all men . . . ” To hear the ironic
Laughter of the music in the other room,
Playing ‘ Ice-cold Katy ’, the gay
Song of an age.

And Sappho, watching the mirror,
Prays to an unreal goddess, and the answer
Comes to her as she gazes into those eyes
Coldly as from a well of water,
The poem writes itself from the well
Of her tears. For love, yearning
For love, the desiderated face !

There remains the popular song,
The old mocking refrain, the senescent
Music of comedy, while the air
Is yellow with September's pears ;
While the heart tears
Its mocking tragedy
Into the shreds of a nobility,
Remembering Sappho,
Remembering the Sibyl's grotto
And the prophetic rage
Of Time and Age.

My lady Muse,
What use is Time and Time's abuse to me ?
Healthily married, happy,
I live in a time of corruption,
And the worms eat,
And the fleas leap in the sheets,
Turning reality
Into decay.
And Time itself is the utmost desecration.

"The difficulties of poetry", says Mr. Nebulis,
"Are great in our time and age. Like the limb
Of an old tree, noble among
The scurvy profligates." I hear him hum
A few bars of a new tune
As I follow him to the door. The moon
Is cold and complete in a sweet sky.
"Good-bye, my friend, good-bye."

I return to my table : I return
To the locked keys of the typewriter :
"A mechanical age." The picture
Folds and unfolds before me as on a screen,
The lady of bronze becoming
Real, then misting
To that timeless, ancient one,
To a tone
Of gold.

And, as the visionary years unfold,
What shall I behold there, what shall I grow
Upon my paper,
To what use
Shall I offer my Muse ?
And what use shall be made of me
By Time ? What shall I write
That does not write itself ? What shall I be
Beyond an imaginary conversationalist,
Being right
Only in invented particulars, being true
Only where I persist
In feeling as I do ?

The picture in the frame can never be anyone else
But myself,
Whether it pictures you or you or you.

New Year's Eve

NORMAN NICHOLSON

All our perceiving is a memory.
The flood-waters of the senses back sluggishly up the nerves,
And when the waves clamber on the rocks, the upper pools
Are still as goldfish bowls, and weeds spread wide on the floor
But brine chills the blood of the stream, the cool
Frill of foam pushes among the rushes
When the tide is already ebbing from the shore.

The glance is seen
Only when the glance has been ;
The touch is felt
Only when the hand is gone ;
The word is heard
Only when the word is spoken ;
And only when the silence is broken
Is the silence heard or felt or even known.

All our memory is a perceiving.
Only in memory are the seven words
Linked from lip to ear at the heart's call ;
Only in memory are the seven notes
Strung on the thread of a tune ;
Only in memory are the smile, and all
The accessories of greeting and of parting,
The flush, the wind-unravelling curl,
The round of breast and thigh,
The blue of a dress, the angle of an eye,
The unasked, unintended pressure of the turn of a knee,
Fleshed and embodied as a girl.

To know is to accept that understanding
Is beyond our hands and away from our eyes.
Even a tree is a thought, a girl's hair
Is a creed, a need is a prayer.
Life is faith, seeing is believing :
All our memory is a perceiving.

March

GEORGE WOODCOCK

Over the hilltop where the poet stood,
Across the empty acres of the sheep
Where single trees sheltered the lonely herd
Men have made greater loneliness,

And where the thousands grunt and strive,
Earn and repay and die, the grey streets run
Each to its dark and many solitudes
Where the weak are single within their walls.

Single within their walls, cut from the past,
Alone in the present within their prison of paper,
They await in their sorrow a gaudy revelation
Or a slick revolution led by romantic leaders,

. And out of their loneliness nothing arises, no flower
Breaks the smut on the bough or stirs the earth
Out of its dusty drought. Their souls are set,
Frozen in a barrenness no spring can unlock.

On other hills and minds the ice is broken,
The weak rays probe the earth and the tentative leaves
Creep like thoughts from the branches of the brain.
Here only in this sad March the dusty pathways
Centre on the mind and bear no green.

Poem

THOMAS MERTON

April, like a leopard in the windy woods,
Sports with the javelins of the weather ;

And the hunters,
Eye-level with the world's clean brim,
Sight their strings, in masking rocks not moving,
And shower with arrows
The innocent, immortal season.

Hear how like lights these following releases
Of sharpened shaft-flights sing across the air,
And play right through,
Unwounding, clearest windworks——

'To disappear unpublished in the reeds.

But where their words are quenched, the world is quickened
The lean air suddenly flowers ;
The little voices of the rivers change ;

So that the hunters put away their silver quivers,
Die to the level of river and rockbrim,
And are translated, homeward,
To the other, solemn, world.

Dirge for the Proud World

THOMAS MERTON

Where is the marvellous thief
Who stole harvests from the angry sun
And sacked, with his bright sight, the land ?

Where he lies dead, the quiet earth unpacks him
And wind is waving in the earth's revenge :
Fields of barley, oats and rye.

Where is the millionaire
Who squandered the bright spring ?
Whose lies played in the summer evening sky
Like cheap guitars ?
Who spent the golden fortunes of the fall
And died as bare as a tree ?

His heart lies open like a treasury,
Filled up with grass, and generous flowers.

Where is the crazy gambler
Among the nickels of whose blood have fallen
Heavy half-dollars of his last of life ?
Where is he gone ?

The burning bees come walk, as bright as jewels
Upon that flowering, dark sun :
The bullet wound in his unmoving lung.

Oh you who hate the gambler or his enemy,
Remember how the bees
Pay visits to the patient dead
And borrow honey from their charitable blood.

You who have judged the gambler or his enemy
Remember this before the proud world's funeral.

I

Among the words and stars of a casual night
the wind is born. Talking between us dies
into the sound of quick departure for
a dusky land, no time to call goodbye.
Look last at careless stones, they still remain
unblown, marking the whole incessant land
like words we dropped to lose and stumble on.
Now journey in the wind, pilgrims to find
an endless stillness in a solemn night.

There is no turning in the hasty air
but rushing onward to an end. The last
of mortal care is hasten to be lost.
But the end, the end of speaking or prayer
we cannot say, for we are like the wind.

II

Words are cairns that mark the trails we know,
but stillward moving is wonder where we go :
no place to go is destiny for wind.
Which scorns to know wherever pylons stood
or if they stand when all the winds disperse
or point a backward way to keep us safe.
And yet a motion always and a life
encompassed by breath only and by sighs
or by the aimless motion of the blood.

Direction is a lie for travellers
who found their destination anywhere,
who seek the backward stoneheaps where they lie.
Reward of souls at journey's end, I say,
is leave to wander silent everywhere.

III

Silence will be our vow and our reward
for we progress into a silent place
like winds inroading final windy space.
The land has ceased to matter, wind is blind ;
this night even the darkness seems to blow
with us devoted to our darker purpose.
The hand in the dark and the assuring word
do not concern the pilgrim souls at prayer :
we seek a still communion as we go.

Our sole assurance is the lonely wind
that pulses on and has no rest in us.
But truly come, truly come so far
arrival will be mute and marvellous :
we will have speechless union like the air.

IV

United and dissembled, parting no more
and bowed before the unborn earth like wise men
who comprehend the ways of the godly sun
we kneel in darker exile and endure.
There is a mourning at the end of prayer
where penitence is lost. The times and rocks
are gone behind, the mortal darkness breaks
and leaves us bare. We have no way to lose
this word discovered in our perfect loss.

See above there, hanging in the air
the shining emblem of a birth. Recall
the vision of the pilgrims, sign of all
this land. It is the fleeting stillness where
the stars in space receive their benediction.

Credit to Paradise

KENNETH PATCHEN

The golden blood of the sun
Floods down in splendid abandon :
And what is full of dread
Dreams within the heart—for look,
We expect most from what we fear.

Even this sun
Which spreads its glorious image on our lives
Is only caught again by the great frozen hand
Which tossed it forth. For think,
Wouldn't it be more a sun
If just once it could elude Him ? If just once
It escaped the relentless fingers ?

The great are always little.
The fun of being God would be
In being nothing : to really live,
We should be dead too.
Isn't all our dread a dread of being
Just here ? of being only this ?
Of having no other thing to become ?
Of having nowhere to go really
But where we are ?

What power has the sun
If it must remain the sun ?
We are afraid that one day the hand
Will not catch us when we come ;
That the remorseless fingers will not quite close over us

And I think that is our strongest will——
The reason all our dreams of paradise
Are dreams of an unlimited disorder
In a lawless anonymity.

*“ Poems Which Are Written by
the Soul ”*

KENNETH PATCHEN

Poems which are written by the soul
Defy man to set down. There is an area
Of feeling too tall for any recording.

Whatever harmony of spirit and life
We may have, is never sturdy enough
To withstand the ravages of our speech—
The meaning of the image is always clear :
But what the Thing is we may only sully.

Where the particular and the universal,
The infinite and the minute, join,
Is the province of the soul——
Here the chill stag carries continents on its back
And the towers of God lift their real and pure spires.

When the great poem is written
And men say : What does it mean ?
—I think the poet will be forgiven should he answer :
Praise God, I do not know :
It is enough that He knows.

PROSE

The Plan

Wolf Mankowitz

At the further end of the corridor there were, he felt certain, simple solutions which his memory stagnating in sleep had not allowed him to present within the compass of his paradoxical prison. The cell, a long corridor, offered no direct statement of imprisonment. Its walls of glass suggested imminent trees and sunlight by day, and by night the cool anomaly of an indiscernible but certain life. The whitewashed ceiling glared with constantly burning mercury lighting, and the plush padded floors were comfortable for sleeping. Furthermore, there was no logical reason why he should not leave whenever he liked, for the one frail plywood door was unlocked, and had it not been, his shoulders could have made short work of it.

So that while there was no compulsion in his remaining there—in fact all his relations expressed surprise at his obdurate acceptance of things—he was nevertheless forced to assume isolation in preference to their neat society. Moreover, he fondled plans for a coup against the corridor, and he was quietly perfecting a stratagem which if successful should bring about a resolution of his whole equivocal position.

He was certain that his cunning division of the plan from the realities of the corridor was an adequate protection. He could further protect by calling the plan's many parts different names, making each contributory unit a complex fable of itself. These names he would spend very long embroidering in his mind, and from one harmony of figures he would develop many associations until his rich work assumed a contrapuntal complexity. For he never need inhibit his decorating with the fear of action. Action all the mouthless tongues of his creatured corridor would condemn, and the fingers of his brain pressed tight to strangle movement the ambitious weapons of his hands.

Under such undivided attentions the still incomplete plan could hobble and crawl. He felt more confidence in his choice of life than ever before. This seemed to vindicate his hours and days, the carping relatives could receive this as a substantial addition to the depleted revenues of the family, but most important, a settlement could be reached with the corridor. At first the plan wriggled slightly and not very often. Its movements could only be detected through the eddying of the fantastic emblems embroidered upon it. They looked like porpoises and flying fishes ; they possessed a mendacity breeding legends. He watched his plan as it accustomed itself to movement so gradually that for a long time it seemed to him to have been arrested in its development at a promising but useless stage. Often anxiety gathered in droplets upon his brow as, watching the plan's exertions, he saw clearly in his mind's refracting mirror, his sole attempt disintegrating to a useless group of symbols—an unhappy congregation where a rook with a broken leg nibbled a chocolate egg, and a broken coat-hanger continually called piteously for euthanasia. But the desperate hope which had in terror fathered the plan was always a source of strength, and it was at least a comfort to know that if the plan proved to be a cripple or a monster, it would, being the only thing, be in its failure a certain conclusion. Sometimes, however, his excitement at seeing an unusually promising suggestion of movement became intense. He would leap to his feet and eyes bursting tears, grip the sides of his skull as if the plan were writhing there and might in its convulsive violence burst the shell. His life alternated between the extreme despair of a motionless plan and the equally exhausting terror of the plan's hysterical promise.

Through the glass walls the sunlight could never succeed in recapturing the pleasure of its pristine existence. The glass distorted the beams, and twisted, they held the essential darkness of the corridor in their inconsolable hollows. Eventually the muttered threat of sunshine became unbearable to him. But once as the light bent and nosed its way into the crevices of his eyes and stopped its explorations only at the very threshold of the shadowed corners, a beam ripped from the others and stamped with the reflection of a leaf, forced its imprint upon the back of the plan. Shielding his eyes he bent his head closer to the place, and soon the plan's pulsating life was clearly manifest. He sat

quietly watching his plan take life. He could scarcely withhold the sickness his horror thrust upon him as the plan dragged itself painfully forward, flickering with the emblems of his past compulsive efforts, an army with banners. His eyes fastened to the plan assumed the logic of its intention. He had suffered every abortive convulsion of its growth, and knew like a tapestry the rare energy of its origins. Then as it reared up from the plush floor he held it so eagerly with his eyes that the pupils were twin points of violence. And now he watched the plan threaten the farthest corner of the corridor.

The plan stretched into the deepest corners. The corridor became suffused with vigour, the plan transforming the place into a mighty promise. The glass walls were opaque with tears and the lighting irradiated rumours of miracles to follow this miraculous birth. Then tired but certain as a diver the plan gathered itself dragging with it a box the design of which he could still remember, and in the rapidly dwindling corridor began like a cretinous child to rearrange the contents of the box. He too became absorbed in the play which was not as they had said, a therapy, but familiarly a compulsive self-torture. He watched his childhood reassemble from bricks, toy engine, and paper house. The recriminating voices of relations pierced with thin shafts the liquid walls of his prison. A design had been completed ; it was the plan and the child playing, the darkest corner and the threatening sunlight, the box and the corridor, closed to the public. And now he sat quite still and his eyes held no normal commitments ; his absorption was completely private.

CRITICISM

East Coker: The Place and the Poem

Dom Sebastian Moore

1 p.m.—A hot day, immediately after heavy rainfall. The air consequently 'rinsed clear', and the view deepened with heavy liquid shadows. We climbed a long tedious hill out of Yeovil which is a depressing place, being a country town in process of urbanization. On the level at the top, a group of villas in the worst style, a 'land of lobelias and tennis flannels'.

We asked a man the way, and he concluded his directions thus, '... then you just *slide* down into the village'.

We did. The lane rapidly becomes deep-set and darkened with high branches on either side. From the ordinary world on the top, you slide down this lane which, by hemming you in, 'insists on the direction'. You slip down, out of the world that 'moves in appetency on its metalled ways. Of time past and time future', into a world *not timeless*, but rather one that has stood still. The impression is of fixity, stasis, hypnosis; and the sensation evoked by the phrase 'Dark in the afternoon' leads up to and is incorporated into this impression precisely as the dark lane leads to, and prepares you for, the village.

'Dark in the afternoon.' The phrase seems to crystallize the quintessence of the experience given by the poem. It is *afternoon*—therefore the light is heavy, blazing and sultry—and yet it is *dark* in the lane; and these words strike us, not as irreconcilably opposed, but as necessary functions of one sensation. There is something similar in a book of photographs called *Picturesque Italy*, the deep impossibly inky shadow felt as somehow the extension of the dazzling light. If you like, the light is oppressive, sultry, *sleepy*, and therefore akin to darkness.

The afternoon light is absorbed, condensed into thick shadow.

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The light is drunk into darkness. And the darkness which absorbs it and brings it to a standstill is East Coker. The sensation of 'light absorbed' is the 'objective correlative' of the poem, the particular quality of sensuous awareness round which it crystallizes and organizes itself and which is, so to speak, seized and forced on you by its poetic embodiment. Bearing this in mind let us proceed to a passage from *East Coker* :

In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon,
Where you lean against a bank while a van passes,
And the deep lane insists on the direction
Into the village, in the electric heat
Hypnotized. In a warm haze the sultry light
Is absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone.
The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl.

Here, light is absorbed, not thrown out in all directions and so multiplied ; not brightly refracted, but absorbed. Swift light comes to a standstill. That is the unifying sensation of the poem, and the essential impression one takes from the village.

For the poem does not proceed from the *idea* of 'light related to darkness' or 'The Dark Night', or any sort of pre-existent idea. It proceeds from a particular *sensation*. The spiritual content emerges from this sensation and is always referred back to it as to its touchstone. If we say 'light implies darkness', 'supernatural knowledge implies a certain ignorance', we can mean virtually anything. Precision is required in order to fix these loose statements at some definite point on their range of possible meanings. Here the defining precision is one of feeling. Hence the questions : 'How does Eliot conceive of light related to darkness ? In a "pessimistic" or an "optimistic" way ?' expect the wrong sort of answer. The only answer is, 'in a way correlative to the sensation of "light-in-darkness" at East Coker'.

One way of showing what this precision of feeling amounts to is by contrasting the 'light-in-darkness' sensation here with that at the opening of *Little Gidding*. Compare the curious sense of hebetude or hypnosis which transforms light into darkness in

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East Coker with the exaltation, the glowing quivering expectancy which accompanies a similar process in the other poem.

In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls
Across the open field, leaving the deep lane
Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon.

When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.

The poetry, then, is defined by being referred to its unifying sensation, or more correctly its unifying idea-sensation. I imagine, incidentally, that the process whereby the poet comes to write about East Coker is something like this : at a given stage in his experience, he becomes aware of a mass of thoughts on the threshold of consciousness and to feel these thoughts as tending to coalesce in a unity proper to their confused near-emergent condition. Then he drops down into the village on a sleepy summer's day, and realizes 'yes, this is the sort of thing I've been looking for'. His various thought-emotions will, he feels, group themselves conveniently round the sensation which the village evokes. The process has an intellectual parallel when a mass of ideas drifting about in search of an anchorage is suddenly unified by some fresh perception of a principle.

The dahlias sleep in the empty silence.
Wait for the early owl.

These lines develop powerfully the sense of a stillness that is not merely inertness, but has a quality of hypnosis. It is not merely inertness, because the stillness is so highly emphasized that it takes on a quality of mystery. 'Dahlias sleep' is a duplication of meaning as is 'empty silence'. I don't, however, want to stress 'mystery' as there is nothing here of the ecstasy which one associates with the word. Moreover, the effect of mystery on the mind is not hypnotic, whereas 'hypnotized' is a key-word in the poem. The deep lane *insists* on the direction. The next line 'Wait for the early owl' is a consummately successful epitome of the preceding images. The implication is that the

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coming of night is not a process at all. Nothing need happen to turn this sleeping scene into night. One has often felt this in a drowsy village. Wait for the early owl, you can almost hear it already. The hoot of the night-bird is appropriate, not alien, to such an afternoon. The succession of times and seasons is therefore stilled, not by being gathered to a point of time-enclosing ecstasy, but by being felt to stand still in a half-conscious indifference. Thus this passage which opens with 'In my beginning is my end' and concludes with 'wait for the early owl' makes the latter correspond to the former, and balances a statement of extreme generality by an opposite extreme of emotional precision. To see this you have only to ask yourself how 'my end' is felt here as present to 'my beginning' or how death within the poem is felt as implied in life. The answer is : precisely as the early owl, the bird of night and death, is felt, in this particular village sensation, as expected by the day. The attitude of life to death has here the peculiar non-ecstatic expectancy with which the dark sunlit afternoon awaits the early owl.¹

We can now show how this sensation presides throughout the poem. To begin with, note how it is knit into I. This section can be analysed into:

- a. General statement of 'life revolving always into death'.
- b. Emotional definition of this—'dark in the afternoon'.
- a₁. The abstract statement, again, but coloured now by the feeling evoked by b.
- b₁. The emotion again.

I have italicized those words which in various ways foster the connection between these four parts.

¹ The specific emotion of this poem is further developed in another passage which, having no reference to the village, thereby shows this emotion as something permanent and not bound up with one local perception.

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for *heat and silence*. Out at sea the dawn wind
Wrinkles and slides. I am here
Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

'Heat and silence' is a useful coupling for pointing to the dominant sensation. Once again this passage reiterates the half-consciousness which anticipates the early owl.

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- a. In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses *rise* and *fall*, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an *open field*, or a factory, or a bypass.
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes, ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of *man and beast*, *cornstalk* and leaf.
- b. In my beginning is my end. Now the light falls
(*presiding* Across the *open field*, leaving the deep lane
emotion) Shuttered with branches, dark in the afternoon.
- a₁. In that *open field*,
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too
close,

Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the *corn*.

The time of coupling of *man* and woman
And that of *beasts*. Feet *rising* and *falling*
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.
- b₁.
(*presiding* ~ Dawn points. . . .¹
emotion)

Once again I must emphasize that the relevant strands : ' Dark in the afternoon ', ' light absorbed, not refracted, by grey stone ', ' hypnotized ', ' Wait for the early owl ' are defined by their location in the poem. Their meaning is that life ends in death,

¹ To insist again on the particular meaning given to the generalities in this poem by the presiding emotion : in *a* and *a*₁ we have the rhythm whereby life flows into death and new generation—and we have it in *Little Gidding*.

We die with the dying :
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead :
See, they return, and bring us with them.

But the emotion is completely different.

Indeed, the four poems may be compared to a complex piece of music in which the same themes (i.e. the same ideas) are constantly recurring, but in different harmonic (i.e. emotional) contexts.

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but the question we have to keep on asking is : ' how is that fact felt in *this* poem ? ' It is true—so manifestly true, that without some particularizing emotional context it means nothing. From this fact men have drawn conclusions varying from sacrifice to scepticism. What is all-important is the attitude which a man has to the fact. The attitude to which the poem compels you is highly complex, but emotionally precise, and its emotional definition is in terms of the ' light absorbed ' sensation which you experience in East Coker.

In the second section there is a further progress towards *emotional* precision through disintegration. The fact of life going into death, felt in the first section as a co-presence of light and darkness, is now expressed as a confusion between birth and death and a merging of the seasons. The expression is offered in a highly ' poetic ' form—and rejected.

What is the *late November* doing
With the disturbance of the *Spring*
And creatures of the *Summer* heat,
And *snowdrops* writhing under feet
And hollyhocks that aim too high
Red into *grey* and tumble down
Late roses filled with *early* snow ?

This won't do—this is not the relevant emotion.

That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory,
A periphrastic study in a worn out poetical fashion.

This develops into a valuation of the concept of ' tradition ', a valuation in touch with the central ' light-absorbed ' emotion. This emotion has been presented as a comment on the life-cycle and on a civilization in contact with that cycle. Now it is implicit in a more definite questioning of ' tradition '.

What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity
And the wisdom of age ? Had they deceived us
Or deceived themselves, the quiet-voiced elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit ?
The serenity only a deliberate *hebetude*,
The wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets
Useless in the darkness into which they peered
Or from which they turned their eyes.

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Now it seems to me that this should be taken in conjunction with the 'light-absorbed' passage. What it means is this : here we are, men living. We have no empirical knowledge of what follows death. Thus our *ad hoc* living must be based on earthly experience. No doubt we can enrich our lives by sharing and communicating what we experience, but ultimately what of it ? What are we and what does our consciousness amount to in the face of death ? Is it, perhaps, no more alive to it than the light is to its lethal darkness in this village afternoon ? Does the light of consciousness go into the darkness as the light in East Coker is absorbed by grey stone ? Do we peer into the darkness in a state of hypnotized hebetude, as the deep lane slides into the village ? Is the serenity of old age, 'prepared for death', the serenity of the village in drowsy stillness awaiting the early owl ?

Perhaps another example may help to show the relevance of emotional contexts to the response compelled by the poetry. Let us consider this passage :

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.

This reflective passage *says* exactly the same thing as the 'history' passage in *Gerontion*. The idea behind it is the oblique nature of the presence of spiritual reality to us as we unfold our lives in time. As a melody, or theme, it is common to both passages but it has, in each, a different harmonic or emotional background, which makes it in each case a different thing. In *Gerontion*, the oblique presence of spiritual reality to active living is correlated to an emotion which it is impossible to define fully but which is most frequently associated with *twisting* and *frustration*—the sort of thing caught in these lines :

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering judas

And what she gives, gives with such supple confusions
That the giving famishes the craving

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Protract the profit of their chilled delirium,
Excite the membrane, when the sense has cooled,
With pungent sauces, multiply variety
In a wilderness of mirrors.

The dulled membrane of an old man, flickering up into an artificial recapture of past pleasure—against this emotional context the elusiveness of ultimate reality must appear as a frustration of *this life* in itself. But in East Coker, in the drowsy village where light is absorbed and time stands still and the dahlias sleep in the empty silence—against this context, the same elusiveness will be apprehended as a state of apathy, of listless acceptance rather than of frustration. As the sultry light slips into the stone, so death will be entered, not 'with direct eyes', but as 'a mild surprise, a momentary shudder in a vacant room'. It is as a result of this contextualizing that section two is able to end in an explicit but convincing conclusion :

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility : humility is endless.

The houses are all gone under the sea.
The dancers are all gone under the hill.

The third section carries on the main theme of life passing to death, with its visual correlative of light slipping into darkness. Without directly recalling section one, it is still in tune with its sensation. The world's journey to death is felt in terms of vacancy. It is not merely that the chairmen and petty contractors seem to pass into nothing. Even before their passing, they *are* nothing. It is a passage of nothing to nothing, of 'the vacant into the vacant'. What is being described is not a violent contrast between life and death, but an undifferentiated succession of one sort of death by another—as in the village-experience light and darkness are not in violent contrast but rather mixed together, as the night-bird might well be heard amidst the sleepy chirp of crickets. It is the essential mood of the poem persisting. We, the light, the conscious, hardly exist. This vagueness of personal consciousness appears in :

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and silence. Out at sea the dawn wind
Wrinkles and slides. I am *here*
Or *there*, or *elsewhere*. In my beginning.

We have to insist on this non-distinction of light and darkness, as opposed to the sharply silhouetted contrasts of *Little Gidding*. In *East Coker* the light becomes darkness through its drowsiness. In *Little Gidding*, on the contrary, light becomes darkness through its blinding intensity, and we get an identification of light and darkness which recalls the 'ray of darkness' of the Pseudo-Areopagite. Darkness of this kind must be carefully distinguished from the darkness which is specified in *East Coker*.

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant.

And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,
Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.

When we make this distinction we are able to see that when the poem turns to a possibility of redemption it is this weak sensation that has to be redeemed. Useless to insert divine significance into a supposed experience that is not ours. It is in the darkness we have come to associate with *East Coker*, the darkness which is peculiar and specific to this poem, it is in this darkness and no other that we await the more fundamental and ultimate 'darkness of God'. There is therefore an emotional continuity between

Wait for the early owl

and

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing ; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing ; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.

This continuity is necessary because if a poem is to be analogously redemptive, if, that is, it is to effect within consciousness a liberation of the will, it must operate this change within the frame of its dominant emotion. A conclusion cannot be imported into a poem. It has to be set up by the poem itself and the fact that it is so set up is bound to affect its quality. Thus the 'darkness of God' in *East Coker* is not simply that darkness as conceived by St. John of the Cross. The phrase is charged with the feelings which have led up to it. The axioms of the mystical doctor, suggested to the poet by the very different darkness that

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his poem is describing, are presented therefore with a note of special irony. That irony is eventually subsumed into the growth of consciousness effected by the poem, but not before it has served as a bridge between the two darknesses—the darkness in the afternoon and the darkness of God.

To recapitulate so far, there is a line running through :

And the deep lane insists on the direction
Into the village, in the electric heat,
Hypnotized. In a warm haze the sultry light
Is *absorbed*, not refracted, by grey stone.
The dahlias sleep in the empty *silence*.
Wait for the early owl.

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and *silence*. . . .

What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,
Long hoped for *calm*, the autumnal *serenity*
And the wisdom of age ? Had they deceived us
Or themselves, the *quiet-voiced* elders,
Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit ?
The *serenity* only a deliberate hebetude. . . .

And we all go with them into the *silent* funeral.

Or as when an underground train, in the tube, stops
too long between stations
And the conversation rises *and slowly fades into silence*.

Hence, when we come to the fourth section, we are not surprised to find this emotion persisting. The theme is 'O felix culpa !' certainly, but the mood of the poem colours this generalization. The emphasis is on the purely humiliating side of the Redemption. Our liberation is to come out of our sickness and futility, so much so that Christ who cures us is in a sense 'futile'. All the images emphasize this. The wounded surgeon . . . the dying nurse . . . the ruined millionaire. The latter image particularly, daring in its juxtaposition of the liturgical mode with all the associations, mostly unpleasant, of 'millionaire', deserves attention. We cannot accept it without

a shock, without feeling 'hasn't he put his foot in it this time?' The fact that the poet has risked this shock shows that he had in mind here something important for the poem. What this image does, in fact, is to register emphatically the connection of this part with the presiding emotion. There is, I mean, *some* connection between 'the ruined millionaire' and 'the Captains, merchant bankers', etc.—as there is some connection between 'the darkness of God' and 'dark in the afternoon'. And the whole atmosphere of hospital, surgeons, nurses and anaesthetics is peculiarly suggestive of our efficient and unreal civilization. It is in the modern hospital, with its exclusive emphasis on the postponement of dying making it oblivious of the significance of death, that our civilization's ineptitude in face of death is most apparent.

The fifth section is explicitly autobiographical. Mr. Eliot expresses his frustration as a poet—and it is a type of frustration of which 'dark in the afternoon' is again symbolic. The dominant note is one of sinking, decay, falling-away. He states his 'difficulty with words' in such a way that it might be simply the explicit statement of the mood engendered by the village. The affinity, moreover, is reinforced by an explicit poetic reminiscence. The last two lines of the first section

I am here

Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning.

are caught up at the beginning of section five

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty
years.

'Here I am' swings the poem back to its opening. It is I, the poet, here in this village stillness, this absorbed light which makes me significantly conscious.

Once we have established this unity of atmosphere throughout the poem, and, in this instance, the unity binding sections one and five, we can go on to suggest further correspondences which would carry little weight by themselves. Thus the image of 'light absorbed, not refracted by grey stone' induces a sense of sinking, of frustration, of paying out only, which the fifth section makes explicit.

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Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion.

We come now to the conclusion of *East Coker*. It has been well said that an Eliot poem develops in a sense more complex than that in which criticism uses that word of a poem. The end of it is implicit in the beginning. Assuredly we are aware of more at the end, but this is because the poem is behind and not before us. Thus, while what happens on the page may be a repetition, what happens in our minds is a process controlled by the presiding sensation established by the poem. The poem, then, begins and ends on the same note. The whole point of *The Quartets* is the steady maintenance, in each, of one level of intensity, of one emotional context, one homogeneous curtain of sound across which the various ideas pass, receiving from it the quality which is appropriate to each poem.

This is verified in the concluding section, where we find an axiom that is familiar enough—the Eliot theme cropping up in poetry and prose :

For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

But this axiom is set against the harmonic background I have described. The *idea* is 'resignation', 'faith', 'carrying on', etc., but such words as they stand are general, unfocused. Here they are focused by the poem's sensation, and become '*this poem's resignation*', '*this poem's faith*'.

How is this done ? For answer I would point to the rhythm of :

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost

And found and lost again and again : and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps there is neither gain nor loss.

For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.

The rhythm is *tired*—'*And found and lost again and again*'—with a complete break, like a sigh, at the centre of each line. But it isn't a tiredness of indifference, of 'chucking up the

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sponge ', because it is controlled by the pervading emotion. It is, in other words, no more indifferent than the first section. It is that section reappearing as the supporting context for the idea of acceptance.

The motif here is that ' it doesn't matter ', but in a special sense :¹ the sense of

I am here
Or there, or elsewhere. . . .

And as the poem draws quietly to its close, the great Eliot themes of ' impersonality ', ' tradition ', are passed in review against the background of section one. We must not worry or fuss or seek personal results—and now we see the *positive* implications of ' light absorbed by grey stone ', of ' I am here, or there, or elsewhere '. At the very end, the theme, the idea that ' it doesn't matter ' gives way gently to the harmonic current out of which it arose. This is marked by the absence of punctuation occurring so as to modulate the definite *statement* that

Love is most nearly itself
When here and now cease to matter

into an undefined *atmosphere* of ' not mattering ' :

Old men ought to be explorers
Here or there does not matter
We must be still and still moving

The various threads of the poem—' the quiet-voiced elders ' and ' here or there or elsewhere '—are brought together now, no longer as ideas but as ingredients of the common atmosphere which brings the poem to its close on the same note as the opening.

The work of the poem is the conversion of

In my beginning is my end

into

In my end is my beginning.

It achieves this in the manner I have suggested—that is, realizing the conclusion as ' A corollary of the opening in the light of a unifying experience '.

The Forgotten Novelist: A Survey of Thomas Mann

D. J. Enright

The case of Thomas Mann is a curious one. At present he is considered by some a great novelist, *the* great novelist of the era, the only novelist to be compared with Tolstoy, while others dismiss him as a colossal and very teutonic bore who managed in his earlier days to write one interesting social study, *Buddenbrooks* ('the German *Forsyte Saga* . . .'). Not that this divergence of opinion is at all strange, for both views are at least tenable—what *is* odd is the fact that this apparently radical conflict of views has given rise to such little critical activity: neither admirers nor detractors have seemed anxious to press their opinions and by now this potential bone of contention has been well and truly buried. I think it high time it was disinterred; after all, the European achievement in the serious double-decker novel has not been so striking of late years that we can afford to turn a blind eye to Thomas Mann, with two two-volume novels and one trilogy to his credit. He is now invariably referred to as 'the distinguished European man of letters', an ominous label often attached to those about to be despatched into oblivion. And since it is fairly obvious that Mann is either a very good novelist or a very damp squib, we surely ought to be able to spare the small amount of attention necessary to discover which.

There is just one preliminary point which should be considered, concerning the English versions of the novels and short stories turned out by Mrs. H. T. Lowe-Porter. Mann possesses an individual—though not individualistic—style: a kind of measured, dignified progress—usually called 'architectural' or 'sculptural', though it is absolutely free from the taint of affectation which these terms are apt to suggest. It is a prose of *good taste*: indeed, one might well advise the young German wishing to form a prose style to give his days and nights to the study of Thomas Mann. Mrs. Lowe-Porter hasn't managed to carry over this even dignity: if you compare almost any section of the original with the translation—particularly descriptive passages

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—you will find that where the former is unhurried, the latter scurries a little—where Mann uses an adjectival clause, Mrs. Lowe-Porter sums up with a bare adjective. But considering merely the quantity of material she was confronted with, Mrs. Lowe-Porter can hardly be blamed for this. Translation is inevitably *précis*: and as it is, English readers usually fail to appreciate Mann's genius for detail. And I think we cannot but admire her treatment of word-play, dialect and illiteracy—such as the workman's 'respects' for 'respects' when the German is 'Alle Achung' for 'Alle Achtung'; cavil as we may, we are certainly under a great debt of gratitude to Mrs. Lowe-Porter.

Mann's first novel, *Buddenbrooks*, was published in the year 1900 and was very well received in Germany. It really belongs to that well-established and time-honoured *genre*, the *Bildungsroman*—the novel which has for subject the correlation of individual culture with social culture, or, of course, of individual disintegration with social disintegration; in this case the latter, for the novel is sub-titled *The Decline of a Family*. If you can visualize concentration of theme within eight hundred pages of written matter, then you have an idea of *Buddenbrooks*. The novel more or less begins with a family feast and it ends with the death of the sickly young male heir: between these two events we have firstly the story of a family, and secondly the well-documented—though far from pedantic—record of a changing civilization: the stable 'ordained' mercantile society of the late eighteenth century yielding to the hectic and precarious commercial society of the late nineteenth century, in brief the change from Burgher to Business Man. But it is not only the way that money is used that has changed: the way that the mind is used has changed too. At the beginning of the novel, placed in Lübeck, the Hansa-town (incidentally Mann's birth-place—his father was in fact a merchant and deputy-burgomaster there), the town-poet celebrates the prosperous merchant family of Buddenbrook in well-turned public verse: towards the end of the book the mistress of an already shaken household plays duets in private with an ambiguous lieutenant. Art, we perceive, now has a greater significance in the lives of the Buddenbrooks, but somehow it is significance of a type which allies itself with the increased uncertainty of business affairs in striking down the hitherto resolute and rock-like family. Mann considers himself

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an heir of Wagner (for his generation it was difficult to be anything else) and, quite apart from his glowing interpretations or translations of his music, his long-sustained narrative with its unmistakable motives is somewhat analogous to the music of Wagner. By motives I mean, for instance, the way Toni Buddenbrooks, even after two unsuccessful marriages, repeatedly and unconsciously quotes quite incongruous opinions she once heard from a young socialist student she was in love with for a week or so in her maiden days. And *The Magic Mountain* is a mesh of cross-references, all of them very meaningful. In his introduction to the English collection of his short stories (*Stories of Three Decades*) Mann refers to this 'conception of epic prose-composition as a weaving of themes, as a musical complex of associations'. But whereas Wagner was a 'pure' musician (I mean that he obviously didn't care what moral effect, if any, his work was likely to have), Mann is always the moralist. In a way he resembles one of his characters, Tonio Kröger, 'an artist with a bad conscience', for Mann is very conscious that when the moralist seeks expression in literary forms he may well discover that he has taken up a double-edged weapon—the likelier the greater his gifts as a writer. But there was never anything less pornographic than the highly erotic atmosphere of *The Magic Mountain* as set forth by Thomas Mann. In dealing with behaviour or opinions which he considers detrimental to a healthy character and a healthy life (and Mann's conception of health is sufficiently broad), he invariably manages to suggest his view of the matter—though only as a possible view. It is moral comment inherent in what one can only call the 'tone of voice' of the writing, and this of course is the kind of thing only a very skilled artist can succeed in.

The question of the relation between the *practice* of art and personal decadence cannot be more than broached now—it is, however, very relevant to Mann's short stories, particularly *Death in Venice*, *Tonio Kröger* and *Tristan*. And although Mann's preoccupation with the bearing that art, either practised or studied, may have on the will and the ability to live is the best-known aspect of his work, *The Magic Mountain* emphatically points out that art is only one of the temptations which beset the civilized man.

One of the main motives of *Buddenbrooks* is the Family Book,

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a record of births, christenings, deaths and other outstanding domestic events, written we are told 'in a stately but simple chronicle style which was no bad mirror of the family attitude, its modest but honourable self-respect, and its reverence for tradition and history'. The spirit behind this document is manifest in the advice—or command—given from his death-bed by Grandfather Buddenbrook to Christian, the first of the neurotic generation : 'Werde was ordentliches'—'Be something worthwhile'. No further definition is required ; the family know in their bones what is meant by that holy 'ordentliches'. Thomas, the son who inherits the business, is industrious and successful—up to a point. He becomes a senator, but he has not inherited the physical strength of the founder of the firm, and business is no longer what it was. A further contribution to his instability is his marriage to the exotic Gerda, whom he describes as 'an artist, an individual, a puzzling, fascinating creature'. In brief, a *modern* phenomenon. His son, Hanno, is a delicate, dreamy child, a mixture of precocity and feebleness, and certainly no true Buddenbrook as the incident of the Family Book reveals. This is not just 'symbolic', it is the kind of thing that Hanno would do: absent-mindedly contemplating the family tree, he takes up a pen and idly makes a double line diagonally across the entire page ; when his father angrily calls him to account, he stammers: "I thought—I thought—there was nothing else coming".

The account of Thomas's death—and virtually the death of the family and the firm—is unfortunately too long to quote. Reading it (Part 10, Chap. 7), one should bear in mind that Thomas is an important and popular leading citizen of Lübeck and the family is still renowned for its integrity, its ceremonial formality, its excellent taste and propriety in every sphere. In this context, and allowing for a certain dullness resident in the translation, the passage is truly horrible. 'Senator Buddenbrook is dead—of a bad tooth.' It is an episode macabre and shocking enough to satisfy the most extreme devotee of the decadent school : but the novel as a whole has many of the so-called bourgeois virtues—common sense, prudence, consistency—possessed by the Buddenbrooks themselves in their happier days. Thomas's death is a striking incident—but, an incident—the decadent writer would have made it the *raison d'être* of the novel.

The book ends with the liquidation of the firm and the death,

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from typhoid fever, of the young Hanno. There is, you can see, nothing apocalyptic about it : a merchant family, proud and apparently strong, has shown itself unable to meet the demands of a changing social and psychological order. Unfortunately its keen pathos—the eternal pathos of the square peg—may well make little impression on those whose nerves have been beaten up by such latter-day sociologists as James Farrell and, now, Arthur Koestler.

Mann's second novel, *The Magic Mountain*, was published in 1924, and has been the subject of more controversy than *Buddenbrooks*, in which most people find something to admire. Though it is the work that made Mann's reputation as a 'European man of letters', it had a very modest genesis. After visiting some sanatorium Mann conceived the notion of writing a satirical short story dealing with the microcosmic nature of such a sanatorium—its divorce from the world of reality, its peculiar system of manners and morals—in short, the rather farcical milieu of self-conscious disease. The story was to have been no more than that, but the idea developed under its own power and, instead, he wrote a novel half as long again as *Buddenbrooks*. And really the idea was much too good to waste on a trifling parody. The sanatorium as a small self-contained world, surveying from its height the outer world (the *Flachland*, Flatland, as the inhabitants call it) with a mixture of fear, distaste, and outraged sensibility : it provides a fine opportunity for the man who wants to discuss the human character, profane and sacred. Particularly so in the hands of one who (according to the foreword) inclines 'to the view that only the exhaustive can be truly interesting'.

The theme is *Wilhelm Meister* again : Hans Castorp, the unheroic hero, is a normal, pleasant, moderately intelligent young man, apprenticed to a firm of shipbuilders, and with a background not unlike that of the *Buddenbrooks*. Here is a description of him :

He was neither genius nor dunderhead, and if, in our description of him, we have avoided the use of the word mediocre, it has been for reasons quite unconnected with his intelligence, hardly even with any bearing upon his whole simple personality, but rather out of regard for his lot in life, to which we incline to ascribe a certain importance above and beyond personal considerations.

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And, again—' very clean, very well dressed, with a little red-blond moustache that became his sleepy young patrician face '. Castorp visits his sick cousin, Joachim, who is undergoing treatment at the International Sanatorium Berghof, somewhere in the Swiss Alps. This visit, really a short vacation for Castorp, is to last three weeks, and he is vastly entertained by the unique society of lung-cases, though at first often shocked by their seemingly indelicate behaviour. For instance, he is quite stupefied by a madcap young lady who whistles at him in a most peculiar manner :

It was an extraordinarily unpleasant whistle, harsh and penetrating, yet hollow-sounding, a long drawn-out note, falling at the end like the sound made by those rubber pigs one buys at fairs that give out the air in a wailing key as they collapse. The sound issued, inexplicably, from the breast.

It transpires that this distinction of hers is due to what is called a pneumothorax—an injection of nitrogen gas into the lung: a distinction, in this sick community, equivalent to that, in the outside world, of owning an expensive car or a country house. However, he decides he might as well obey the rules of the establishment during his short stay, and so he buys a thermometer, takes his temperature at the prescribed intervals and so on.

Living apart from the crowd of inmates is the Italian, Signor Settembrini—a humanist and loquacious advocate and defender of human dignity, who is at work on an Encyclopaedia of Human Progress. Settembrini despises the company his ill-health has forced him into, and addresses Castorp thus :

You are well, you are but a guest here, like Odysseus in the kingdom of the shades ? You are bold indeed, thus to descend into these depths peopled by the vacant and idle dead.

The acquaintance grows, and Settembrini is very distressed when Castorp shows interest in the problem of disease, for to him Castorp is ' life's delicate child ', to be preserved carefully from those things that savour of morbidness, superstition, tyranny or decay—for, he says, ' disease and despair are often only forms of depravity '. But Castorp begins to feel queer himself : he is examined by the presiding physician, Rhadamanthus as Settembrini calls him, and a slight weakness of the lungs is

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brought to light. The visit which was to have lasted three weeks is destined to last for seven years.

Castorp comes to think of the other world, the 'flatland', as something hard, mean and cruel. Settembrini retorts with one of his humanistic anecdotes (taken, one assumes, from the debit side of his *Encyclopaedia*) :

I could tell you of a young man I know, a husband and son, who was up here for eleven months. He was older than you, yes, rather older. They let him go home, provisionally, as much improved ; he returned to the bosom of his family.

. . . The whole day he lay with the thermometer in his mouth, he took no interest in anything else. "You don't understand," he said, "No one understands who has not lived up there. Down here the fundamental conception is lacking." In the end it was the mother who settled it. "Go back," she said. "There is nothing to be done with you any more." He went back, went back 'home'—you know, don't you, that they call this home when they have once lived here ? He was entirely estranged from his young wife, she lacked the fundamental conception, and she gave up trying to get it. It was borne in upon her that he would find a mate up here who had it, and that he would stop with her.

This, then, is the atmosphere of the Sanatorium Berghof : primarily erotic—incidentally, Dr. Krokowski, the assistant physician, is giving an interminable weekly series of lectures on the very suggestive topic : 'Love as a force contributory to disease', in which he tends to arrive at the conclusion that 'symptoms of disease are nothing but a disguised manifestation of the power of love, and all disease is only love transformed'—a somewhat simplified and romanticized version of Freud, very acceptable to the lady patients, and acceptable too, one might add, to the German writers of Mann's earlier days ; indeed, the point at which the realistic school of fiction developed into the overtly decadent school is marked by the substitution for the word and conception *sex*, of the word and conception *love*, an altogether fruitier business. Castorp was unpleasantly disturbed by Dr. Krokowski's frequent use of the word *love* in his lectures—one never knew quite what he meant.

There are continual scandals in the sanatorium about somebody being found in somebody else's bedroom. Even the young people are well acquainted with the idea of death—there is a funny

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story concerning a neighbouring institution which sends its bodies down to the ' Flatland ' in bob-sleds, always during meal-times when the merely moribund are sure to be preoccupied—and so the sexual impulse is functioning with a kind of strained hectic frequency. Castorp receives his education in love—the ' odi et amo ' of the decadents—at the hands of a mysterious Russian grass-widow.

Besides this, the atmosphere of the sanatorium is composed of an eternal avid interest in symptoms, a superior contempt for the brutishness of ' real life ', the complete and absolute absence of the conception of time, and the strict conventions of the establishment—such as the consultation of the thermometer, the daily rest-cure, the X-ray, the rambles, the rather piggish meals, and all the transitory enthusiasms which sweep through this little community—playing the gramophone or consulting the spirits—for the patients must needs live at fever-height or else die, a little sooner than they would otherwise, of boredom.

But, as we know, the novel is not merely the description of life in this kind of institution for the cultivation of disease. The sanatorium is, so to speak, the back-cloth against which Castorp's struggle for self-knowledge is so keenly revealed. To put it rather pedantically, the three main factors in this struggle are represented by three of the patients—three triumphs of the novelist's art, too. The first is Settembrini, whom we have already met, the rationalist, the humanist, the unswerving believer in progress and man's unconquerable soul. His verbose enthusiasm does not escape Mann's irony: Castorp, though conscious he himself is but a humble novice, cannot help sometimes seeing the Italian pedagogue as a ' barrel-organ man ', one whose eloquence is often facile and who, in his zeal to disinfect the human soul, has set his face against much that seems to Castorp worthy of study and even fascinating. Settembrini's attitude to music is typical of the man : art and literature he prizes as aids to human knowledge and the progress of the race, but, he says, ' there is something suspicious about music, gentlemen. I insist that she is, by her nature, equivocal. I shall not be going too far in saying at once that she is politically suspect '. But we do not for a moment doubt Settembrini's sincerity and goodness of heart.

The second figure is altogether more sinister : Naphta, the

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little Jewish Jesuit, upholder of all forms of absolutism, of Communism and the Inquisition. In thought he is the complete counterpart of Settembrini, but the two lodge in the same house, outside the sanatorium, and have lengthy and fierce arguments, with Castorp, 'this still unwritten page', present as, in fact, the Prize. Naphta is a more agile logician than Settembrini and is particularly successful at deflating the somewhat windy eloquence of his opponent. He has a most brilliant mind and with his mordant sarcasm he plays the viper to Settembrini's Voltairean grass-snake. But however more skilful Naphta may be in argument, we are not meant to consider him the advocate of Truth. In fact, late in the book when tempers are getting frayed all round, Naphta challenges Settembrini to a duel after an especially bitter controversy. Settembrini behaves admirably throughout ; he fires his bullet into the air and offers his body to Naphta. Naphta screams "Coward !" and shoots himself through the head. Thus it is indicated to us, as plainly as a novelist may properly indicate, that : a humanism which is patently inadequate in its attitude towards the human soul, which ignores inconvenient depths, holes and corners of the mind and concentrates itself in a frothily optimistic excitement over the vague and dubious conceptions of Freedom and Progress, may manifest itself, nevertheless, in action which is dignified, noble and even moving ; while a penetrating and cynical absolutism—prepared to face all possible perversities concomitant on the human personality and to resort to any measures, however terroristic, to establish order—may, notwithstanding, end by annihilating itself instead of its opponents.

But there is a third figure, more powerful than either Settembrini or Naphta. This is Herr Peeperkorn, an elderly Dutchman from Java. He is somewhat akin to that popular comedian who makes long speeches consisting of incomplete—or improperly completed—sentences. Except that he is not a comedian. Here is a typical pronouncement by Herr Peeperkorn :

Ladies and gentlemen. Very well. Very well indeed. Very. Settled. But will you keep in mind, and one—not for one moment—not one moment—lose sight of the fact—but no more. On this point not another word. What is incumbent upon me to say is not so much—it is in the first place simply this : it is our duty—we lie under a solemn—an *inviolable*—No ! No ! Ladies and gentlemen.

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It was not thus—it was not thus that I—how mistaken to imagine that I—quite right, ladies and gentlemen ! *Set-tled*. Let us drop the subject. I feel we understand each other, and now—to the point !

It sounds ludicrous. But with Peeperkorn's compelling gestures and his gigantic personality behind it, no one is tempted to laugh at him. On the contrary, he is quite capable of subduing—almost one might say hypnotizing—a whole crowd of noisy, excitable people with a gesture and one or two disjointed and meaningless phrases. He has no taste or gift for argument and yet, when he is out with Settembrini and Naphta and their audience, he dwarfs the two philosophers, however brilliant their wit and however exquisite their logic, merely by waving vaguely in their direction and saying, "Yes, yes—cerebrum, high-cerebral, you understand. Very ; that is—it shows". The disputants somehow seem immediately silly, insignificant.

But Peeperkorn includes them as well as transcends them. Settembrini's attitude towards disease is plain and strong—'disease and despair are often only forms of depravity'—and when Castorp takes to visiting those who are near their end Settembrini warns him, 'let the dead bury the dead'. Naphta takes the contrary view, he even announces 'the genius of disease is more human than the genius of health' (again, the slogan of the decadent artist)—and there is something more than necrophilism in his attitude. Now there is on record one connected statement by Herr Peeperkorn, articulate only since it is reported by Castorp. The subject is nominally snake-bites, and the substance of what Peeperkorn said is that

In the world of matter, all things were the vehicle of both life and death, all of them were medicinal and all poisonous, in fact therapeutics and toxicology were one and the same, man could be cured by poison, and substances known to be the bearers of life could kill at a thrust, in a single second of time.

'In the world of matter'—and, I think the implication of Peeperkorn's personality is, in the world of the spirit as well. Peeperkorn, one can say, represents the *Weltgeist*, the great common World Soul. He is swayed by titanic emotions from which he cannot find relief by rationalizing them into theories. For it is not Naphta who exemplifies the deep-seated irrational forces latent in human nature, the 'dark gods'—no, he merely

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exploits them for the sake of accomplishing intellectually conceived ends, just as Settembrini either denounces them or else tries to tame them to his own purposes. *They* are philosophers. They have formed deliberate attitudes towards the lower strata of the soul ; Peeperkorn is these lower strata *incarnate*—but still anarchistic. Settembrini and Naphta are talking to—and *for*—Hans Castorp ; they are talking *about* Peeperkorn. I think this is the only interpretation of the situation between the four figures which will explain how the ponderous inarticulate old Dutchman manages to eclipse the two theorists—neither of them inconsiderable. It also explains why Castorp attaches himself to Peeperkorn with such fervency—for we know that Castorp is in search of a teacher.

But Peeperkorn hastens his death with a hypodermic needle which is a copy of the mechanism of the cobra's bite, and Naphta shoots himself. Castorp begins to realize that this preparatory education is very enthralling but he will only discover the meaning of life if he participates in it. The sanatorium is a kind of caricature of life—the human characteristics exist in a state of florid exaggeration : ' life's delicate child ' can learn much from observing these fantastic blooms, but he cannot *live* among them. But over-education has sapped his will-power and it takes a universal catastrophe—the outbreak of the so-called Great War—to shake him out of his lethargy. Castorp packs his bags and leaves immediately for the ' Flatland '. Settembrini, of course, is overjoyed to see him conquer the unholy fascinations of the ' kingdom of shades ' ; he regrets that Castorp will fight on what he considers the wrong side, but in his goodness of heart he acknowledges that this is only a detail.

The novel ends with a scene of war : Castorp is stumbling through an artillery bombardment. There we leave him. But we know that ' life's delicate child ' is no longer delicate and no longer a child. What standards his actions in after-life will conform to is a question not explicitly answered ; and possibly he will be killed in the war. But it is most likely that if he survives he will be governed by that ideal which lies half-way between Settembrini's glorification of the ego and Naphta's abasement of the spirit—the ideal which Hölderlin arrived at, after he had long considered the glory of man and the greater glory of the gods—*Seid nur fromm*, ' Simply be pious '.

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All this talk about 'figures' and the attitudes they represent may unhappily have suggested that the novel in any way resembles the Rex Warner-Edward Upward notion of fable. It does not in the least. There is only as much aura of distortion or 'other-worldliness' about the novel as is fitting to its location in a sanatorium. The people we meet there may be caricatures, but they are living, likely caricatures. It is not a fable treating of the maladies of pre-1914 Europe; it is a work of art with moral implications relevant to any country and any time. Consider the scores of excellent minor characters in the novel: no bona-fide fabulist would tolerate them for a moment. Frau Stöhr, for instance, a kind of Mrs. Malaprop, who suggests, when Joachim the gallant young lieutenant dies in the sanatorium, that they ought to play the 'Erotica' over his grave. It is an intensely entertaining novel throughout—except perhaps for such rather boring stretches as Castorp's very 'literary' interest in biology.

I do not intend to say much about Mann's work since *The Magic Mountain*. On the whole it is, I think, disappointing. The biblical trilogy, *Joseph and his Brethren*, doesn't seem to me quite to hit the mark. The intention behind the work is very significant: it is a study in myth. Mann writes in the Prelude to the first volume, *The Tales of Jacob*:

What concerns us here is not calculable time. Rather it is time's abrogation and dissolution in the alternation of tradition and prophecy, which lends to the phrase 'once upon a time' its double sense of past and future and therewith its burden of potential present.

He cites the example of the Great Flood—which was the Great Flood? There is really a succession of floods—a tradition of floods dating back to the beginnings of time. Thus the biblical story is what one might call a precipitate of Tradition; and to a mankind of the very far future this war that has just ended may give something in *their* conception of the Great Flood. Myth, we should remember, is more likely to make an ally of the Press and the microscopic film than to be defeated by them.

Hence the trilogy shows us Jacob, Joseph and the others *not* as primal Super-Men, the unambiguously chosen of God, accomplishing a unique achievement—but as bewildered human beings participating in just one recurrence of a nature myth. It is an interesting project, but I doubt whether it has proved worth the

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tremendous labour involved. On the one hand we already had the Bible—and, on the other, the idea of the recurrence of myth is fairly well known. The project would have been as adequately carried out in an essay—as indeed it was in the Prelude to *The Tales of Jacob*—as in a three-volume novel. What it boils down to is, to quote a reviewer, ‘a magnificent vision of an ancient, patriarchal life through highly civilized eyes’—and as such it is clearly the work of an extremely intelligent and cultured Master.

In 1939 came *Lotte in Weimar*, which is a study of Goethe and in effect a study in genius. It seems to me a very sound piece of work. The occasion of the erstwhile Lotte Buff’s visit to the ageing Goethe (whose relations with Lotte, of course, partly inspired his *Sorrows of Werther*) gives the novelist a fine chance to examine the conflict of romantic and classical elements in the poet’s mind. Goethe is inclined to resent Lotte’s visit; the *Sorrows*, after all, were the sorrows of Werther, not the sorrows of Goethe. The novel must be one of the most interesting critical studies of Goethe accessible to English readers.

The last novel to be published, quite recently, is called *The Transposed Heads*. It is based on an Indian legend concerning physical love and spiritual love and a maiden who wants the best of both worlds. It is readable and witty, but I hardly think one can take it very seriously; it is the nearest Mann has come to *belles-lettres*.

No, Mann’s important books are still: first of all, *The Magic Mountain*, then *Buddenbrooks*, certain of the stories—notably *Death in Venice*, and *Lotte in Weimar*. More than any other modern artist, Thomas Mann has expressed in these works almost every aspect of the struggle for existence as it *was* experienced by the intelligent person born into the world of yesterday, *is* experienced to-day—and, in spite of post-war reconstruction, *will* be experienced in the world of to-morrow. With such devastating power to attack the nerves, Mann could have established himself in what one might call the Line of Wagner. But he gave a cool philosophy priority over sensation-mongering, however striking, and thus he occupies a notable position in what one might distinguish as the Line of Goethe. To us, his appeal is as a moral, more prudent, Wagner, or a more ‘exciting’ and contemporary Goethe. And beside him I am afraid our modern novel looks rather provincial.

Recent American Poetry

John Taylor

A great deal of poetry is being written in America. Thanks to the exchange regulations I haven't read even a respectable fraction of it, but the little I have read has convinced me that some of it is good, a little of it bad, and none of it quite so bad as the 'teen-age doodling that gets marketed in England. High up among the good poets I should place Harry Brown. Secker and Warburg¹ have published a selection from his work, so anyone who wants to can verify my rating. Brown has the camera eye, an intelligence which is not content with snapshots and a technical skill which is exemplarily displayed in his handling of *terza rima*. Those who like doing so can pick up apt images by the handful. 'Where once upon green mornings sunlight wrote its yellow signature upon wives' floors' and 'A country cut from silence and from sleep' are typical and one can add modulations into Elizabethan rant.

Nameless, like powers they are
Of thunder in the annals of yo
Of these are you, O newest a
Perfection like a crown sits o

But it is important to insist that, in
glitter is part of an organized effect.
able but they are seldom squandered.
tration of this economy is in these lines from ~~The Disembarkation~~
of the Hero :

Suddenly
He raised his arm. The bronze-sheathed ship moved out
Toward the horizon's height. A wind arose
And caught the sail and curved it toward that chasm
Where earth ends and the adventure is the air.
Under the crew lay nothing but the past,
And over them rumbled fast the last storm's studied
thunder.

The slowing down of the pace by the open vowels is reinforced by the internal rhyme and this is still further emphasized by an extra foot in the last line. You seem almost to stop on the brink

¹ *Selected Poems*, Secker and Warburg, London.

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of the abyss. Then against this hesitation the drum-roll of d's builds up steadily to its reverberating climax. A man who can balance energies in this way has learned a good deal about writing. Brown doesn't always manage his *décor* as efficiently—*Valedictory Ode* is I think a little inflated—but this attention to detail is persistent enough to make everything he turns out worth re-reading.

Shapiro is more spectacular and less impressive than Brown. The surface yield of his poetry is attested by the fact that *Person Place and Thing* has been reprinted three times in England in the same year. *V-Letter*¹ will be equally successful. Shapiro's fondness for a five-foot anapaestic line—about a third of the poems in *V-Letter* are written on this basis—is typical of his firm, unsubtle music. His imagery is precise but not always inevitable:

Though I see you, O rainbow of iron and riveted lace
As a dancer who leaps to the moment of music and light
And poised on the pin of the moment of marvellous grace
Holds her breath in the rhythm and curve of her motion-
less flight.

If the title were blacked out it would be difficult to conclude that this is a description of Sydney Bridge. The passage emphasizes a danger that Shapiro should guard against, the danger of using his undeniable virtuosity to build up a hard shell of assertion that has nothing to do with any central insight. Having made this reservation it only remains to add that *V-Letter* reveals a falling off from the comparatively high standards of *Person Place and Thing*. Shapiro argues in the préface that 'the contemporary man should feel divested of the stock attitudes of the last generation, the stance of the political intellectual, the expert, the salesman, the world traveller, the pundit-poet' This does not mean that Shapiro refuses to take a stand—*Nigger* does and so does *The Jew*, and so, to a lesser extent, do poems like *The Puritan* and *The Intellectual*. But it does mean that the poet must stand for an honesty which is beyond the simplifications effected by these attitudes. Whether Shapiro can achieve this detachment remains to be seen, but his latest work does little to encourage the assumption.

IxI,² the title of Cummings's latest book, is symbolic. Cum-

¹ Reynal and Hitchcock, New York : Secker and Warburg, London.

² Henry Holt, New York.

'mings may multiply, but he cannot increase. There is really not much more to be said about Cummings's workmanship since Blackmur dissected it in *The Hound and Horn*. On the whole, Matthiessen is not unjust when he concludes that 'it might be said that from the moment he turned his first noun into a verb ("but if a look should april me") he has been writing the same poem'. Cummings's one poem is against all isms. As he says on page IX 'a salesman is an it that stinks excuse', though he should have asked someone who'd been sold a vacuum cleaner. The poem which follows this is more telling :

a politician is an arse upon
which everyone has sat except a man.

These protestations, variously defined, add up to Cummings's grand affirmation that 'the single secret will still be man'. It is a secret he does his best to hide with brackets, capital letters and syntactical perversions. If typographical high-jinks like this are to be justified they must symbolize something radically new in the experience which they are supposed to capture. But nothing anyone sees is *that* unprecedented. To say this is not to deny Cummings's sincerity, his technical accomplishments, or the value of what he is trying to say. But it is ironic that a poetry so on its guard against formulae should end by acknowledging an ism of its own, an unorthodoxy as tyrannical as any of the conventions it assaults, and one which seems to forget that secrets only exist, given the basis of common acceptance which frames them.

Aiken has written the long poem that Brown and Shapiro will one day have to write.¹ It begins with time past and time future, a river and a bird, so now we all know what Mr. Aiken has been reading. Collateral reading also includes *The Infantry Journal* for June 1943 and William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*. *The Soldier* is a poem which questions the Ultimate Nature of Things and, like all poems of this kind, it proceeds to a culminating acceptance in terms of the categories which the questioning has established. The moral is *Nosce Teipsum*. The single secret will still be man and the last war is won in battle against yourself. However, this kind of reduction to epigrams is unfair, and with writing on this scale it amounts to an unwarrantable interference

¹ *The Soldier* : New Directions, New York.

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with the poetic effect. The only assessment you are entitled to make is in terms of the reorientation to which the poem compels you. And here I have to admit that I am not compelled to feel anything by *The Soldier*, that the rhythm, though sonorous, is also invertebrate, and the whole poem gargantuan where it ought to be athletic. Sometimes this is not so, and the necessary economy is attained through the control exercised by a precisely felt image :

Remember the sail at Sunium
far down through fog at the cliff's edge seen,
curved and small as a gull's wing, beating
like death's wing out of the sunlight.

But more often than not it is diffused and dissipated :

In the country, you know how the birds come : March blows
their thousands
North from the Savannah and Chattahoochee, the Nile
the Euphrates,
over brown steppes to Saskatchewan and Kamchatka, the
cuckoo crying
from the Arabian Desert to Yalta, the nightingale
winging to the Dover Straits from his Spanish garden.

And so on for ten more lines, until September blows them southward. The epic manners revealed here are also implied in less ostentatious roll-calls :

Consider, soldier,
whatever the name you go by, doughboy, dogface,
(*solidus*, a piece of silver, the soldier's pay)
marine or tommy, God's mercenary—consider our lot

When this sort of inflation goes on uniformly over a poem of nearly a thousand lines, the gross effect is bound to be one of flabbiness. Aiken has written much that is very much better than all this.

Thomas Merton, whose *Thirty Poems*¹ appear in the same series as *The Soldier*, is occasionally worth watching. Merton, who is now a Trappist monk, was born in the south of France, which perhaps accounts for the picture-postcard sharpness of his writing. These lines on Lorca are a fair imitation of the Lorca idiom:

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¹ New Directions, New York.

Where the white bridge rears up its stamping
 arches
Proud as a colt across the clatter of the
 shallow river
The sharp guitars
Have never forgotten your name.

The best of such writing has an attractive innocence:

They say the sky is made of glass
They say the smiling moon's a bride.
They say they love the orchards and the apple trees,
The trees, their innocent sisters, dressed in blossoms,
Still wearing, in the blurring dusk,
White dresses from that morning's first communion.

It is difficult, very difficult, to say these things, and even more difficult to keep on saying them. If Merton could say them more convincingly one could forgive the exuberance which is the converse of such freshness. It is inevitable that he should write lines like ' At once the diplomats start up as white as bread/Buckle the careless cases of their minds ' or ' A hundred dusty Luthers rise from the dead, unheeding,/Search the horizon for the gap-toothed grin of factories '. He can even title one of his lyrics *The Blessed Virgin Mary Compared to a Window*, where a more cautious writer would dolefully have said *Poem*. What Merton has to guard against is not this simplicity, but the tendency to let his symbols interfere with the poetic vision which they are supposed to assert. This shows up clearly in lines like the following:

Be kindled, intellect although your strongest lights
are night-lights

By the beams of this wonderful sun
Created wisdom makes at best a metal monst'rance for
His crown
And those stiff rays look like no living light :
They are no more than golden spikes and golden thorns

Merton can also lapse into Apocalyptic bad manners :

Torn from the wise world in the daily thundercracks
of massbells
I drink new fear from the four clean prayers I
ever gave thee.

The poem from which this is taken has all the elements of Jack-

Christ mysticism, including gall and vinegar. But such criticism is pointless unless it is qualified by the insistence that Merton most of the time writes better. There is, for instance, the beautiful opening of *The Regret* :

And ducks drum up as sudden as the wind
Out of the rushy river,
We slowly come, robbed of our rod and gun,
Walking among the stricken cages of the trees

As I read Marguerite Young's latest book of poems¹ I realize sadly that I was never meant to read it. The poetry I like is vigorous poetry that gets up and gets going, that steams away wordily into the ultimate problem. But Miss Young is a poetical jay-walker at the cross-roads, meditating ethereally on the ultimate nature of traffic. Here is a specimen of her ruminations :

The propaganda of a bird
Is the seed upon his wing
From the denuded islands drowned
In an older time than spring.

For Christ, the mediation process, moves ever between
self

And tentative as that anarchic angel,
A noun which has no corresponding entity in space

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· The nearest parallel to this sort of writing in England is in the work of Peter Yates. But Yates very wisely uses a shorter line, and his imagery is, on the whole, more incisive than Miss Young's apparatus of snowdrops, birds and flowers. However, better critics than I have been enthusiastic about Miss Young, so there are no doubt thousands of spiritual creatures who are capable of responding to these ethereal permutations.

Muriel Rukeyser's characteristic poetry is bolder and more brutal than Miss Young's. *Beast in View*¹ looks like a textbook on photography. The jacket has a vicious spiral by McKnight Kauffer, which may or may not be Patchen's astonished eye. The title is from Dryden, but it is difficult to imagine poetry less like Dryden's than Miss Rukeyser's. It is big-boned verse, ill at ease in lyrics, cramped by the short line, but rising more competently to larger arguments. Miss Rukeyser fails in the gesture à la Auden :

The girl whose father raped her first
Should have used a little knife ;
Failing that, her touch is cursed
By the ommissive sin for life :

She can also lapse into romantic incoherence :

Mystical passion, fury, the taste of the world.
The calling of the world, and everything man fears :
Poetry, poetry, bravery, poverty, war.

But these weaknesses are less obtrusive in their contexts than out of them. Miss Rukeyser's poetry is capable of building up a momentum which is usually sufficient to carry it over such failures. What is regrettable is that her imagery, with its uniform insistent undertone of violence, ends up by weakening the effect it is meant to produce. It is a kind of emotional area-bombing in which everything is hit besides the target. Perhaps I can best illustrate this criticism by quoting what I think is a representative passage from the *Sixth Elegy* :

Betrayed, we are betrayed. The set of the great faces
mean it, the following eyes. They are the flayed men,
Their strength is at the centre, love and the time's
lie at their skin. The kiss in the flaring garden

¹ Doubleday Doran, New York.

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when all the trees closed in. The knotted terrible lips.
The black blood risen and the animal rage.
The last fierce accident, whose back-thrown drowning head
among the escaping sound of water hears
slow insane music groping for a theme.

For all its vehemence the passage is carefully organized. The inevitability suggested by the repetition of 'betrayed' is reinforced by 'set', 'great' and 'following'. The contrasted associations of 'flaring' and 'closed' pave the way for the more explicit contrast between the 'black blood risen' and the 'drowning head'. Yet the passage is too clamorous to rise to any climax. 'Flayed', 'terrible', 'fierce' and 'insane' constitute no progression, not even one of violence. Moreover, the imagery is too private. It means more to Miss Rukeyser than it can ever mean to her audience, and the difference is one that concerns the poetic effect. The strain on one's visual imagination imposed by 'knotted terrible lips' cannot be justified by the undertone of savagery it sustains. Furthermore, this sort of indefinite romantic horror is not confined to this passage. It tends to persist through all Miss Rukeyser's work. Everything that happens in her poetry happens at either noon or midnight. Her favourite colour is black, so much so that she hardly mentions another. Equally, her symbols of creative unity—music, constellations and the dance—break under the strain which her poetry puts upon them. What Miss Rukeyser's poetry needs above all is restraint. The *Seventh Elegy*, the most impressive poem in the book, is successful because it is restrained, because it is relatively seldom that it confuses strength with convulsiveness. Such criticisms would be pointless if Miss Rukeyser were a less ambitious poet. But she is endowed on the jacket with 'a passionate concern with the human' and 'a vast intellectual curiosity', and if she intends to write on the scale these tributes imply she must be persuaded to leave out lines like these:

The gesture arrives riding over the breast,
Singing, singing, tender atrocity,
The silver derelict wearing fur and claws.

It is typical of Miss Rukeyser's poetry that she can follow this lapse up with one of the most effective images in the book :

O love, I stood under the apple branch.
 I saw the whipped bay and the small dark islands,
 And night sailing the river and the foghorn's word.

Here, in my opinion, the right balance is struck. The idyllic romanticism of the first line is just sufficiently broken up by 'whipped'. The landscape is indefinite enough for one to project one's personal feelings into it. Yet the associations of 'whipped' and 'dark' prepare us for 'night sailing the river' for the blotting out of this interval of beauty. Because Miss Rukeyser writes like this more often than my quotations suggest her poetry should continue to merit attention.

Robert Frost's *Masque of Reason*¹ is very attractive but it is not a masque. It is a discussion based on the twenty-third chapter of Job, with witty asides on Waller, Dante and Browning. The blank verse is well behaved, but a little too fond of accented first syllables and feminine endings. The stage directions are written into the text. There is a recognition scene to end all recognition scenes ('It's God/I'd know him by Blake's picture anywhere') and a slangy good humour which shows up in the following :

I need some help about this reason problem
 Before I am too late to be got right
 As to what reasons I agree to waive.
 I'm apt to string along with Thyatira.

But in the end I really don't know what Mr. Frost is talking about. However, there is a phrase here and there about 'submission to unreason' and 'showing off to the Devil' and these are taken up in a retort by Job :

Yet I suppose what seems to us confusion
 Is not confusion, but the form of forms,
 The serpent's tail stuck down the serpent's throat
 Which is the symbol of eternity
 And also of the way all things come round,
 Or of how rays return upon themselves,
 To quote the greatest Western poem yet
 Though I hold rays deteriorate to nothing,
 First white, then red, then ultra red, then out.

The attempt to change the subject is typical. Everybody in this book persistently side-tracks everything. However, a good

¹ Henry Holt, New York.

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time was undoubtedly had by all, and at ten cents a page anybody can have it.

Allen Tate's *The Winter Sea*¹ is typical of his work, which is the same thing as saying that it is a restful book to read, particularly if you've been beaten up by Rukeyser. But there are times when even Tate puts his elbows on the table :

Irritable spring, infuse
Into the burning breast
Your combustible juice
That as a liquid soul
Shall be the body's guest

As this quotation suggests, Mr. Tate's chief weakness is to expect too much of his epithets : ' venereal awl ' is a good example, and so is the aggressive ambiguity of ' time's engaging jaws '. Apart from this, Tate's triple stressed line is not as lithe as Eliot's. Without offering the explanation as more than tentative, I should suggest that the difference lies in Eliot's more expert use of the caesura. However, the short-rhymed stanzas go well with the pervading crispness of the volume. Once or twice the unity breaks down and then the impression one gets is of a self-consciousness at odds with its mode of poetic deployment. But in the best poems, such as *Jubilo*, even this self-consciousness can become a valid convention. And when, as at one point in *The Seasons of the Soul*, the poet can temporarily forget the critic, the results are not only workmanlike but moving :

All the sea-gods are dead.
You, Venus, come home
To your salt maidenhead,
The tossed anonymous sea
Under shuddering foam—
Shade for lovers, where
A shark swift as your dove
Shall pace our company
All night to nudge and tear
The living wound of love.

The civilized restraint of this passage is all the more welcome in an age in which restraint is looked on as a means of discouraging rather than of shaping emotions. It is a pity that Tate

¹ The Cummington Press, Cummington, Mass.

cannot always write like this, and that the feeling which his sense of form should normally arrange is often repressed by a fine, but too tyrannical, intelligence. Nevertheless, *The Winter Sea* is worth reading, especially by those who are apt to confuse poetry with the undisciplined (or self-disciplined) exercise of emotions.

In an outline of this kind, based on reading which is largely accidental, several books must be ignored which deserve to be discussed. I am sorry not to have said anything of Jarrell, Schwartz, Brinnin, Fitzgerald, Lowell and Penn Warren, whose recent work I have read only in fragments. I wish I could have seen more of Rexroth's long poem, *The Phoenix and the Tortoise*, which, despite its faults and some irritating jargon, does reveal some of the stamina essential for philosophic poetry. I am particularly sorry not to have mentioned Wallace Stevens, who has never written a bad poem and who during the past few years has written some of his best ones. But I hope that even a hurried outline like this may persuade people to read American poetry and that those readings, if they do nothing else, may at least serve to remind us of standards of technical achievement which have fallen into disuse in English poetry to-day.

The Double Man

Julian Symons

I

Reading a few reviews of *For The Time Being*, one is impressed by the very positive insensitiveness and bewilderment of liberal and donnish critics about this long philosophical poem. Mr. McCarthy in the *Sunday Times* and Mr. Stonier in *The New Statesman* were equally puzzled to say what the poem was all about ('My business as a reviewer', Mr. McCarthy wrote, 'is to inform others what this poem is about—and I can't. . . . I must fumble about as best I can'); Mr. Stephen Spender, in

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a review percipient about some minor points, implied that the two long poems which the book contains were lacking in unity, and were in fact best considered as a number of short pieces, some of them excellent, and others dull. Now, the construction of *For The Time Being* is in some ways rather loose, but it is not at all unintelligible : perhaps the best way of writing about the poem is to give first of all an idea of its generally ignored subject, and Auden's treatment of it.

The Sea and the Mirror, the first of the two long poems in the book, is a commentary on *The Tempest*: but it is a number of other things too. By working in a semi-dramatic form Auden is able to make a number of implied and some explicit suggestions about the mind and philosophy of Shakespeare; at further removes the commentary gives us Auden's own attitude to *The Tempest*, to art in general, and implicitly to life. In a poetic preface the Stage Manager, a mixture of Auden and God, points out to the critics some contradictions between 'art' and 'life'. Art, or Imagination, the Stage Manager suggests, in verse of an incomparably easy and civilized tone, is everything that 'gives existence its surprise'; it is everything wonderful and terrible lying 'on the other side of the wall'. When we lose it, Prospero says in the next section, in which he is talking to Ariel, we know that we have become old. Prospero is revealed to us, in verse of a controlled magnificence rarely exceeded by Auden himself, as essentially a common man ('Liberal reformer type?' I noted when I was reading the book for the first time—but that is much too precise). The magic Prospero uses in *The Tempest* Auden views as art, and Prospero is 'the personified type of the creative': and yet in this poem Prospero is merely a vehicle through whom Ariel has worked. Now that he is leaving Ariel, Prospero can look forward only to dismal old age,

with eyes that water

Easily in the wind, and a head that nods in the sunshine.

The other characters in the play, he reflects gloomily, have received their pardons; they have 'been soundly hunted by their own devils into their human selves', and are more fully integrated characters. But Prospero, an average sensual man, has been allowed by Ariel to look into the mirror of art, where 'All we are not stares back at what we are': now that the mirror is

taken away he is dropped coldly on this side of the wall, an old man who knows 'what magic is—the power to enchant that comes from disillusion'.¹

This is Prospero: the supporting cast replies to him in speeches that are 'in character' with their parts in the play, and at the same time show them in opposition to the weariness and wisdom of Prospero. Antonio is revealed as a 'man of action' ('Fascist type?' I wrote down in my notes, but that is again an over-simplification), who does not acknowledge Prospero's need for love. The other characters are as remote from Antonio as they are from Prospero, because they are all aware of the need for love, without possessing the artist's transforming vision that gives it power. They speak in poems that, once again, reveal Auden's extraordinary versatility. Ferdinand expresses himself in a sonnet, Sebastian in a sestina, Alonso in a heavily-accented line finely suited to the prosaic advice he gives to Ferdinand; and always the general is evolved from the particular, so that Stephano's drunkenness becomes a search for the womb, and Gonzalo is enlarged into a personification of all bores, as

The councillor
In whose booming eloquence
Honesty became untrue.

Each of these characters has a strongly-marked individual existence, and the important role given to Antonio (a role quite disproportionate to the small part Antonio plays in *The Tempest*, but not at all disproportionate to the importance of all the characters like Antonio—of whom Coriolanus is a vast, magnificent extension—in the Shakespearean canon) is conveyed with particular skill.

And now we approach the least understood part of this

¹ I have said that *The Sea and the Mirror* is in one of its aspects a commentary on *The Tempest*. It would need another essay to remark in detail on the subtlety of Auden's commentary; but is it not obvious that the view of Prospero I have outlined tells us more about his relation to the play and to Shakespeare's ideas than a dozen academic treatises? What was Prospero like, Auden asks, before he became a magician? And the answer is that he was a type of the 'plain man.' There is a strong suggestion in Auden's poem that Shakespeare himself is not unlike Prospero. . . . A similar subtlety informs the depiction of the other characters, who are almost all shown in a way that bodies out Shakespeare's sketch of their characters, and lends fuller meaning to their parts in the play.

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intricate and impressive poem: the long piece of stylized and ironic prose, full of extended metaphors and conditional clauses, in which Caliban addresses the audience. I said 'least understood', but I might have said simply, 'most ignored': the only comment I recall on this chapter is that of Mr. Stonier, who suggested that a friend had suggested that it might all be an elaborate parody of Henry James. The style has, indeed, an obvious relation to that of James at his gamiest: the essential point which has been missed, and which handsomely justifies Auden's use of this post-James manner, is that only such a style can convey all the overtones and undertones implicit in Auden's attitude. Consider the first sentence:

If now, having dismissed your hired impersonators with verdicts ranging from the laudatory orchid to the disgusted and disgusting egg, you ask and, of course, notwithstanding the conscious fact of his irrevocable absence, you instinctively *do* ask for our so good, so great, so dead author to stand before the finally lowered curtain and take his shyly responsible bow for this, his latest, ripest production, it is I—my reluctance is, I can assure you, co-equal with your dismay—who will always loom thus wretchedly into your confused picture, for, in default of the all-wise, all explaining master you would speak *to*, who else at least can, who else indeed must respond to your bewildered cry, but its very echo, the begged question you would speak to him *about*.

What is the begged question? What, in Auden's philosophy as it is gradually unfolded here, does Caliban represent? He is able to talk to the audience (in the place of Shakespeare) in this mannered prose, on the most curious and disparate subjects: on the nature of dramatic and other art, and its relation to the outer world that lies on the other side of Art's mirror; on the role of the artist in society; on the average man's desire to be carried back by art to a state of innocence which is merely an illusion. It is difficult to disentangle all the threads that run through this section, difficult to discover precisely what function is allotted to Caliban and to Ariel, and to the 'Him' referred to frequently with a capital letter, who seems to possess some of the characteristics both of Shakespeare and of God. I offer as a conjecture, more than I press as a statement, the idea that Ariel represents in Auden's mythology, the dynamic force of imagination without which artists cannot create, and that Caliban's part

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is that of Man as he generally is, brutish, ignorant and unamiable. It is an essential part of the dichotomy that Auden envisages as an invariable element in life that Ariel and Caliban are inseparable. A song by Ariel to Caliban emphasizes this point, and forms the Postscript to the poem :

Weep no more but pity me,
Fleet persistent shadow cast
By your lameness, caught at last,
Helplessly in love with you,
Elegance, art, 'fascination
Fascinated by
Drab mortality

Perhaps this formulation seems merely mechanical ? The skill with which it is used, and the subtlety in artistic criticism obtained by its use, are well shown in the passage in which Caliban speaks to young men who have 'decided on the conjuror's' (that is the artist's) profession. 'Somewhere in the middle of a salt marsh or at the bottom of a kitchen garden or on the top of a bus, you heard imprisoned Ariel call for help, and it is now a liberator's face that congratulates you from your shaving mirror every morning.' The artist forms a pact with Ariel, who does his bidding at all times ; the artist becomes, thanks to Ariel, a universally knowledgeable being.

No perception however petite, no notion however subtle, escapes your attention or baffles your understanding : on entering any room you immediately distinguish the wasters who throw away their fruit half-eaten from the preservers who bottle all the summer. . . . Your nose detected on love's breath the trace of ennui which foretells his early death, or the despair just starting to moulder at the base of the scholar's brain which years hence will suddenly blow it up with one appalling laugh.

You are in fact a famous author. And then :

One day which you can never either at the time or later identify exactly, your strange fever reaches its crisis and from now on begins, ever so slowly maybe, to subside.

Your artistic life is used up, and you are merely annoyed by Ariel who stands around all the time waiting for orders. But when you ask Ariel if he wouldn't like to take a vacation he

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says, gauchely : " No." At last you tell Ariel that he is free : but he refuses to budge. Finally :

Striding up to Him in fury, you glare into His unblinking eyes and stop dead, transfixed with horror at seeing reflected there, not what you had always expected to see, a conqueror smiling at a conqueror, both promising mountains and marvels, but a gibbering fist-clenched creature with which you are all too unfamiliar, for this is the first time indeed that you have met the only subject that you have, who is not a dream answerable to magic but the all too solid flesh you must acknowledge as your own:

Ariel has turned into Caliban : and Caliban is reality, is, in a word, Man.

Why does Ariel turn into Caliban ? The point of the parable, which could hardly have been conveyed with more neatness and economy, is that the artist does not produce with his eye upon the object. Ironically, he is able to interpret life only by becoming detached from it : but this detachment itself precludes a completely truthful view of the predicament and nature of man.

Before looking at the poetic implication of the ideas advanced in *The Sea and the Mirror* it is necessary to consider the long title-piece which makes up the rest of the book, and which has no obvious connection with the other poem. *For The Time Being* is called a *Christmas Oratorio* : as this sub-title implies, it is cast in a semi-dramatic form, and perhaps designed for musical exposition. Its relation to *The Sea and the Mirror* is made through a connecting-link of ideas: the two poems are wholly distinct in theme and execution, but the ideas advanced in *The Sea and the Mirror* are carried some stages further in the title-poem.

For The Time Being has a religious, and indeed biblical, background : various sections are headed *Advent*, *The Annunciation*, *The Temptation of St. Joseph*, etc., and the poem ends with *The Flight Into Egypt*. The poem can be called a religious one, in that its subject is man's need for belief in a Primal Cause. But the religious apparatus is not integral to the form of the poem, and has relevance only in the development of its central advocacy of a form of belief.

The Chorus in the *Advent* mourns the passing of personality, while 'darkness and snow descend'. Power ebbs from the

signet ring, Caesar yawns, the general falls down dead and his horses die of grief. Winter has invaded the personality : ' the evil and armed draw near '. There follow several of those brilliant, casually-written pieces of blank verse which are almost Auden's most characteristic contribution to contemporary writing. These pieces lament again the end of the personality : ' the pattern composed/By the ten thousand odd things that can possibly happen ' has been disturbed. Nothing like our present experience has occurred before in man's history. The second World War is not mentioned specifically, but it is made clear that because of events which are not specifically detailed :

Although there's a person we know all about
Still bearing our name and loving himself as before,
That person has become a fiction ; our true existence
Is decided by no one and has no importance to love . . .
This is the Abomination. This is the Wrath of God.

Can the self, then, the argument runs, be eliminated ? Not without exploring every possibility of error, a Recitative repeats. And the final Chorus of this section asks : ' O where is that immortal and nameless Centre from which our points of/Definition and death are all equi-distant ? ' It will not be discovered, the Chorus implies, by anything less than an act of faith.

This argument is repeated throughout *For The Time Being*. It is put with so many variations, and in so many verse-forms, that attention is never lost, though the argument is often obscured. Sometimes the injunctions to faith are made in a manner that one hopes is ironic (one of the Choruses has a theme line : ' There's a Way. There's a Voice ') ; sometimes the biblical story is deliberately geyed, as when the Chorus says :

Mary may be pure,
But, Joseph, are you sure ?
How is one to tell ?
Suppose, for instance. . . . Well. . . .

Some of the variations are on the theme of love, which is regarded as a misleading or beguiling force ; on the deceptions and failures of power, shown through a comic biography of Caesar ; a meditation by Simeon on the fall from Paradise emphasizes again the human compulsion to investigate all the

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possibilities of error. There is an extraordinary prose piece in which Herod, depicted as a theorist of the Rational Life, laments the need for the massacre of the innocents. This unreasonable idea of God, he says, must be stamped out ; the conception of God's existence, in fact, is one which will plunge the human race into madness and despair. Herod, therefore, commits the error of barbarous action in pursuit of humane ideas, proclaiming as he orders the massacre : " I object. I'm a liberal. I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born." The whole poem ends with a statement of the present human situation, put in the poem's own terms. Christmas is over, the tree must be dismantled, we are back again in the world where ' Euclid's geometry/And Newton's mechanics would account for our experience '. We have lived during Christmas in the presence of marvels : and now ' The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all '. But if we have absorbed the Christian experience, we have absorbed also the consciousness of guilt : an act which involves suffering is the only atonement. But we should not seek out this act of suffering :

In the meantime
There are bills to be paid, machines to keep
 in repair,
Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to
 redeem
From insignificance.

It is on a note of prayer and humility that the poem ends, with a Chorus which emphasizes : ' He is the Way . . . He is the Truth . . . He is the Life.'

II

I have dealt with the ideas conveyed and the statements made in *For The Time Being* at length, partly because there seemed some need for clarification of the poem ; partly to show that the reader must realize that an attempt is being made to relate Auden's philosophical beliefs with what is going on in the world to-day, before he can gather the poem's whole fine width and subtlety. The philosophic idea on which *For The Time Being* is based, and which is present in almost all Auden's later work is that there is an essential dichotomy in the nature of man. Prospero, for instance, is the ' personified type of the creative ' ; but

take away the transforming magic of art, and he is an average sensual man. Auden writes of Prospero with sympathy; but he writes of Antonio, Prospero's opposite, with equal sympathy. It is obviously his belief that it is the duty of the creative artist to understand, rather than to feel partisan preference. For Auden as an artist, perhaps, there is no such thing as a bad man.

Once one has learned to look for this fundamental dichotomy, it is visible everywhere in the poem: in Ariel's relation to Caliban, and Antonio's relation to the supporting characters, of course; but on an abstract plane an opposition is set up between 'art' and 'life', and between the coarse, brutish nature of Man and the refinement of some of his products; while little ironic juxtapositions of widely varying points of view occur from page to page, almost from sentence to sentence. It is important for Auden, too, that these dichotomies shall never be resolved: Caliban and Ariel, Prospero and Antonio, are complementary forces making up the complete whole which is mankind (and of which Stephano, Trinculo, Gonzalo, etc., are subsidiary figures, less important than the two great types, Antonio and Prospero). *The Sea and the Mirror*, then, is a poem designed to show the dual nature of Man. The skill of the expression is astonishing; to be able to combine with this humanist statement about mankind, almost incidentally, a brilliant criticism of *The Tempest*, indicates the extraordinary reach of Auden's mind.

When one has gone so far in clearing the ground, when one has made some at least of the necessary explanations, when one has indicated clumsily enough Auden's subtle intelligence, an uncomfortable awareness hangs about of a question unanswered, and even unapproached: precisely the question of the *value* of this elaborate and curiously-constructed edifice. A critic altogether friendly to Auden's genius may still legitimately say that it is no doubt a brilliant *tour de force* to write a philosophical poem about the nature of man which is also a commentary on *The Tempest*: but why, after all, do it that way? Why drag in such manifestly frivolous and irrelevant bits as the observation on Adrian and Francisco:

Good little sunbeams must learn to fly,
But it's madly ungay when the goldfish die.

Is it possible, it still seems reasonable to ask, to justify the *form*

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of this poem ? It is clear enough, I hope, that *For The Time Being* is one poem, and that it is almost irrelevant to pick out little bits and say : ' Now, *that* is a fine poem ' : but it is on a justification of much that is apparently frivolous, a proof of coherence in much that is apparently casual, that assessment of the value of the poem must ultimately rest.

One can explain, I think : to justify is another matter. The ' double man ' is a conception that has always troubled Auden : the attempt to show the Janus-face of life—at its simplest a mask of comedy and tragedy, on another plane identification of the satirist with the object satirized—occurs in every one of his books, and marks particularly his rare and curious expeditions into critical prose. Consider, for instance, his note on *Jehovah Housman and Satan Housman* in *New Verse*, and his obituary on Yeats in *Partisan Review*, which takes the form of speeches by Prosecuting and Defending Counsel. These criticisms show in an acute form the result of Auden's feeling that *there is a great deal to be said upon both sides*. He separates very satisfactorily the two sides of Housman's character ; he makes excellent cases both when prosecuting and defending Yeats : but nothing is resolved, and the reader is left simply with the impression that the conflicts in Housman's and Yeats's work are too complex to be defined. It is this awareness of life's complexity that prompts Auden to insert comic ' business ' into the most serious poem : and the ' justification ' of such knockabout interludes is that Man is not wholly a serious animal. ' At times we are doctrinaire, at times we are frivolous ' : and the lines of doggerel given to Adrian and Francisco, the music-hall vulgarity and badness of some of the verses in the second poem are an acknowledgement of our frivolousness. Man's needs are more various and more fluid, the idea runs, than the rigidities of any philosophical system can comprehend : and any poem which sets out to convey the nature of Man must show him as comic and tragic, serious and ridiculous, pathetic and boring at once. This is the logic behind the frivolities and the lack of cohesion. It bears a close relation to the logic that prompted the ' cultural-reference rock-jumping ' of *The Waste Land*, and the logic that prompted Wallace Stevens to place a rococo surface of decorative and finicky language on poems written with a perfectly serious intention. I believe that such a logic cannot be poetically justified :

that it detracts from the seriousness with which we view *The Waste Land* as poetry, that it makes many of Stevens's poems no more than graceful exercises performed by a virtuoso of language, and, finally, that it makes *For The Time Being* a poem that we cannot regard with the perfect sympathy we give to such diverse poems as *Paradise Lost* and *The Rape of the Lock*. The poetic convention which maintains that the manner of a poem must have a direct relation to its subject is a convention that has been observed, with rare exceptions, for some centuries ; and it is not an idle convention. We cannot in fact take seriously the religious ideas of a man who is able to caricature his own professed beliefs ; we cannot accept as a reasonable philosophical viewpoint the idea that all philosophy is meaningless. Auden's theory of the double man is one that may very well be made the subject of a poem ; but there is a flippancy in the treatment of this serious theme which, one is bound to feel, is caused by a flippancy in Auden's own nature and in his view of the world. It is a mistake to think that you can show the fluid nature of man by showing the variousness of his moods and activities : in this sense ' detachment ' on the poet's part is necessary and good. Nothing can be more damaging to a poet who pretends to take man's fate seriously (as Auden does) than a sense of man's ridiculousness.

When this has been said, where do we place *For The Time Being* ? Among, I suggest, the impressive failures of literature ; among the fine conceptions that fail because their author is not able to body them out with the execution they deserve. When one says this, one is placing *For The Time Being* very high : on the same shelf with the *Essay on Man* and *In Memoriam*. If we regard it rightly, as a single poem, then it is certainly the finest poem Auden has written. If we compare it with the other poetic performances of our time, it far exceeds them in skill, subtlety, and in everything except that basic seriousness which is the prerequisite of a *great* poem. The ignorance and insensitiveness that have marked its reception in England reveal painfully the depth to which literary criticism has sunk in our time.

The New Contributors

The most recent of GEORGE ORWELL'S several books is his satire, *Animal Farm*. A collection of his essays is in preparation and may precede this book. ARTURO BAREA'S books include a study of Lorca and a trilogy of novels, of which the third, *The Clash*, is currently in press. The latest of NICHOLAS MOORE'S books of poetry is his collection, *The Glass Tower*. THOMAS MERTON has published one book of poems and has also had work in *The Chimera* and *View*. I know nothing of WILLIAM JOHNSON except that I like these poems which were given me by Howard Nemerov. KENNETH PATCHEN'S poetry has been widely published in this country; the best known of his prose works is *The Journal of Albion Moonlight*. His latest book, *The Memoirs of a Shy Pornographer*, has just been issued by New Directions, and a collection of his poetry is to be published in England. WOLF MANKOWITZ has had a poem printed in *Voices*. SEBASTIAN MOORE has published an essay on Hopkins in *The Downside Review*. John Taylor has not been previously published in this country.

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